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WASHINGTON AND THE REVOLUTION

A Reappraisal

GATES, CONWAY, AND THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS



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WASHINGTON  
*and the*  
*Revolution*

A REAPPRAISAL

GATES, CONWAY, AND THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

by Bernhard Knollenberg

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FIRST PRINTING.

To  
M. T. K.



## PREFACE

FOR many years I have been at work on a detailed history of the political developments of the American Revolution from the Tea Act of 1773 to the French Alliance of 1778. I began with the assumption that anyone tempted to read my book would be familiar with the elementary facts about the Continental Congress and the military side of the Revolution. But as my work progressed, it became evident that, from the time (July 1775) that Washington takes the center of the stage, the more widely read books on the Revolution give a distorted picture of some of these facts. This applies especially to the facts concerning the relations between Washington and the Continental Congress and Generals Gates and Conway. I found myself in a position similar to that of a lawyer forced to try a case before a judge, who, far from being prepared to take judicial notice that the sun rises in the east, or that six is less than eight, had been taught the opposite.

This book is designed, in some measure, to correct this distortion. Without purporting to offer a complete restudy of the war, I have undertaken to present certain episodes and characters in what I believe to be a truer light.

During the first thirty years of the present century, Sydney George Fisher, Claude H. Van Tyne, Francis Vinton Greene, William E. Woodward, Shelby Little, Rupert Hughes, and other historians and biographers made great progress toward correcting the misimpressions created by



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their predecessors.<sup>1</sup> But their work has been largely undone in recent years by John C. Fitzpatrick, editor of the monumental Bicentennial Edition of the *Writings of Washington*. In his recent biography, *George Washington Himself*, he has apparently taken literally Washington Irving's remark that:

"There is a certain meddlesome spirit which, in the garb of learned research, goes prying about the traces of history, casting down its monuments, and marring and mutilating its fairest trophies. Care should be taken to vindicate great names from such pernicious erudition." (Irving, *Columbus*, 1828, I, 40.)

At first blush, this protective point of view, however unscientific, appears to have at least the virtue of charity. But it does not have even this much in its favor. For, in order to maintain the tradition of the hero's nonexistent infallibility, it is necessary to shift the responsibility for the consequences of his lapses to others, who are made the scapegoats for his mistakes.

It has been the common practice among historians to accept the accuracy of any statement made by Washington concerning the men and events of the Revolution as representing final, unimpeachable truth. Thus Hughes, in his *George Washington* (II, 282), after quoting Gouverneur Morris' exclamation "What a set of damned scoundrels we had in that Second Congress!," says:

"If all this sounds like an indictment of the founders of the republic where panegyric is de rigueur, the blame must be laid

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<sup>1</sup> In speaking disparagingly of historians and biographers of the Revolution under the general term "the historians," I, of course, appreciate that there are other exceptions besides those named in the text, especially among those who have written on some special phase of the Revolution rather than on the Revolution as a whole. (Appendix, Chapter XV.)

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upon the facts that 'continue to stink under the flowers. And the principal witness is Washington himself, whose testimony is not to be impeached, and whose achievement cannot be understood if the truth is suppressed."

The undesirable effect of accepting Washington's statements as conclusive is illustrated by Hughes' treatment of the Conway Cabal which Washington declared was formed against him in the winter of 1777-78. There are two common versions of this affair. The first is that a triumvirate of high military officers (Generals Conway, Mifflin, and Gates), encouraged by Samuel and John Adams, some of the other New England congressmen, and Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, conspired to have Washington deposed from the chief command of the army in favor of Gates. The second, championed by Hughes, is that the military leaders were but cat's-paws of the congressmen, who were the principal offenders. If one proceeds on the assumption that Washington's testimony is necessarily true, one or the other of these versions must be correct. But if this Fundamentalist conception of Washington's infallibility is discarded, if his statements are regarded as open to question, then another possibility presents itself; namely that perhaps neither group is the villain of the piece because there was no cabal at all.

I have rejected the conventional view as to the unimpeachability of Washington's statements and, while giving weight to them, have taken pains to check their accuracy against all other available, contemporaneous evidence.

I have relied exclusively on contemporary letters and diary entries for my source material, not because I think they are always unbiased, honest, and accurate, but because

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they are more dependable than memoirs, letters, or other documents written long after the event. The colonial newspapers, valuable in studying the events leading up to the Revolution, are almost valueless for the purposes of this book. They contain little authentic war news, the official documents published in them are almost invariably in print elsewhere, and the letters or supposed letters to the publisher which they contain are usually anonymous and patently propaganda.

This book dissents from the conventional presentation of Gates, Conway, and the Continental Congress, and also of Washington himself. It takes issue with the conventional view, expressed in Beveridge's *Life of John Marshall*, I, 121, that "Washington was the Government. Washington was the Revolution." It gives facts showing the ability of Congress and Gates. It reveals Washington's hypersensitiveness to criticism and morbid determination to prove himself always in the right; traits which led him to shift responsibility for his errors to others and to be unduly suspicious of the motives of those who ventured to criticize or differ with him. It brings out his misunderstanding of those whose social or economic status was different from his own and shows that his judgment in military matters was sometimes fallible. These facts are worth developing because they show that the success of the American Revolution had a broader base than appears from the conventional histories and biographies; that the Revolution was won, not despite, but with the help of the Continental Congress, Gates, and others commonly accused of having hampered Washington.

At the same time I have not overlooked Washington's qualities of greatness and recognize that they tower above his limitations.

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First and foremost, Washington was a very brave man. Not once, as far as we know, from his baptism of fire in the prelude to the French and Indian War (when he wrote his brother John, "I heard the bullets whistle, and, believe me, there is something charming in the sound") to the end of the Revolution, did he ever seek to avoid personal danger or flinch in the face of it. His frequent exposure of himself is referred to with pride in the letters and diaries of his soldiers, and must have done much to maintain their morale. Equal to his bravery was his ability to keep his head in a tight spot. After the defeats at Long Island and the Brandywine, and on the night before Princeton when he was almost surrounded by the force under Cornwallis, his coolness and resourcefulness were superb.

Another admirable and valuable trait was his lack of sectionalism. Though, as we shall see, he was harsh in his judgments of his New England troops and unwise in expressing them, he was no less severe and outspoken in his judgments of the Virginia militia. Nor can I think of a single instance in which it could be maintained that Washington, in disposing of the forces under his command, sacrificed the general good for the benefit of Virginia or the South as a whole. It is also significant that his letters contain no such remarks on the surpassing virtues of the character, manners, or talents of his neighbors as tincture those of some of the New England leaders. Allied, perhaps, was his freedom from nepotism. Even the greatest of the British statesmen of the eighteenth century repeatedly used their influence to secure desirable posts for their sons, nephews, and cousins, without reference to fitness. This custom, as illustrated by the activities of Franklin and some of the Livingstons, had gained only too firm a hold in America. But

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Washington, from first to last, would have none of it.

Finally, most important of all, was the perfection of Washington's devotion to duty. He loved Mount Vernon and his other near-by plantations with an intensity that flashes from almost every one of his known intimate letters written during the Revolution. There were long lulls in the war, particularly after the summer of 1778, when, in good conscience, he could have asked Congress for a furlough to visit Mount Vernon. But for eight years, with the sole exception of two short visits during the Yorktown campaign in 1781, he was on the job, day and night, seven days a week. His pertinacity was superb.

The general reader cannot be expected either to accept my reappraisal on faith or to track down a long series of citations to satisfy himself that my views are better founded than those which he has long accepted as true. Consequently, to carry conviction I shall lay the source material as succinctly as possible before him, and let it speak for itself. Besides, readers will find it more interesting to see and interpret for themselves the letters and diary entries that are the raw material for history-writing than to have some one else's version of them. I shall give the date of each letter and diary entry quoted or cited, partly in order to save repeated citation of the same compilations, partly to show that the statements quoted were made at or very near the time of the event under discussion.

The importance of exact chronology cannot be over-emphasized. The happenings in one place must be correlated as to time with those in another. Temper, qualities of judgment, points of view of the participants change. The historian and the intelligent reader alike must at all times have in mind the sequence of statements and events

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on which the historian's interpretation is based. Nothing has caused more serious error in the writing and understanding of the history of the American Revolution than the failure to observe this precaution.

The citations in the text are usually abbreviated; the complete title of the book or series of books, the full name of the author, and the name of the publisher and place and date of publication will be found in the Table of Books Cited appearing just before the Index.

Much of the book is based on hitherto unpublished letters in libraries in the East and the Huntington Library at San Marino, the W. L. Clements Library at Ann Arbor and the British Museum. But, as the reader will see, the value of this book is chiefly in its reappraisal of previously published material, especially Washington's letters in Fitzpatrick's (Bicentennial) edition of *Writings of Washington*, Ford's *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Burnett's *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, and Force's *American Archives*.

Each chapter is headed by a quotation from some well-known historian as the simplest means of bringing out the contrast between the history of the Revolution as it has been written and the facts.



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## CHAPTER I

# GATES AND THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

"Gates had no fitness for command, and wanted personal courage . . . a petty intriguer, not a soldier."  
(Bancroft, *History of the United States*, 1866, 1874; IX, 407; X, 324.)

ONE of the most puzzling aspects of the Revolution, as it is commonly depicted, is the action of Congress in giving successive military commands of crucial importance to General Horatio Gates, who, according to the historians, was incompetent and contemptible. Corbin in *The Unknown Washington* summed up their verdict in describing him as:

"Gates the lying intriguer for Washington's command; Gates the sluggard of Saratoga and the wretched fugitive from Camden; Gates the vile traducer of Hamilton's revered friend and kinsman, General Schuyler; Gates the incompetent who could be trusted only to wreck any high project with which he was concerned." (pp. 235-36.)

In my opinion this verdict is unjust. I think that Congress, far from being duped by Gates' pretensions—the usual explanation of its action—had excellent reasons for its great and continuing confidence in him. Gates had fought in America throughout the French and Indian War as a regular officer in the British army. He was with Braddock in Virginia, later served with the armies fighting the French

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in northern New York, and finally was with the British troops in the West Indies that captured the French island of Martinique in 1761. In this last campaign Gates so distinguished himself that the commanding officer, General Monckton, gave him the honor of carrying the news of victory to England, where the rank of major was given him by George III in recognition of his merits.<sup>1</sup>

When peace came, Gates lived for some time as an inactive officer on half-pay in England, but eventually sold his commission and settled (1773) on a plantation near Winchester in western Virginia. An ardent Whig in politics, he was a warm supporter of the patriot point of view in the colonial controversies with England, both before and after his coming to America, and was with Washington at Mount Vernon just before the latter set out for the Second Continental Congress. (Fitzpatrick, *Diaries of Washington*, II, 194; entry of May 3, 1775.) On June 17, 1775, two days after Washington's appointment as commander-in-chief, Gates was appointed adjutant-general of the Continental army, presumably to the satisfaction of Washington and certainly to that of his brother, Samuel Washington, who wrote Gates on June 22:

"As my Brother has been prevailed on to take the command of the Continental Army I am happy in your being with him in the capacity you and he mentions, as your greater Experience

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<sup>1</sup> Ordinarily promotion could be obtained by a junior officer in the British regular army upon the retirement of his immediate senior only by the purchase at a large price of the next higher commission. Occasionally, however, higher rank was conferred for outstanding services. Gates, the son of poor and undistinguished parents (his mother was housekeeper at the seat of the Duke of Leeds; his father was a government clerk), could not have risen to a majority save by exceptional merit.

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will assist him in the arduous business." (Gates Papers, The New York Historical Society.)

Gates, as was to be expected from an experienced and successful professional officer, proved to be invaluable in helping to organize and discipline the army. In asking him to resume his post as adjutant-general, on March 10, 1777, Washington wrote:

"I look upon your resumption of the Office of Adjutant General, as the only means of giving form and regularity to our new Army. I had in vain cast my Eyes upon every person within my Knowledge, and found none that I thought equal to the Task, except one Gentleman, Major Apollis Morris, but his Character and Intentions are of too dubious a Nature to intrust with an Office of such high importance."<sup>2</sup>

Two weeks before (February 23, 1777) the president of Congress, John Hancock, had written him:

"the Army . . . in Point of discipline and Order has suffered much since you relinquished the Department of Adjutant General."<sup>3</sup>

Gates was transferred from the staff to the line and appointed a major-general by Congress in June 1776 to deal with one of the most serious crises of the war.

Ten days after Lexington and Concord, patriots in Con-

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all letters or orders of Washington referred to are as published in the Bicentennial Edition of the *Writings of Washington*, edited by John C. Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick arranged the letters and orders chronologically, so that the date is usually the only citation needed or given. In the few instances in which a page citation is required, this work is cited as "*Writings of Washington*."

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all letters or diary entries of members of the Continental Congress referred to are as published in Edmund C. Burnett's *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*. Burnett arranged the letters chronologically, so that the date is a sufficient citation.

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necticut set on foot an expedition to surprise and capture the decayed but still important British forts at Ticonderoga and Crown Point on Lake Champlain, which a score of years earlier had played so critical a rôle in the French and Indian War. Noah Phelps, Bernard Romans, and Edward Mott of Connecticut, with funds supplied by a group of Connecticut leaders, quickly got together a loose-knit band of Vermont and western Massachusetts volunteers, led by Ethan Allen and Seth Warner of Vermont, and James Easton and John Brown of Massachusetts. At about the same time, Benedict Arnold, who had led a company of New Haven volunteers to the support of the Massachusetts troops gathered near Boston, was commissioned by the Massachusetts Committee of Safety as a colonel to raise a regiment in western Massachusetts for this same purpose. Although Arnold had not yet succeeded in recruiting any substantial force, he insisted on sharing the command of the Connecticut expedition, which easily secured the peaceful surrender of the posts in May 1775. (See the *Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society*, Vol. I, for a detailed account.)

This easy success encouraged Washington, in September 1775, to take the rash step of sending a thousand men under Arnold from the American forces besieging the British in Boston to attempt the surprise of Quebec. A shortage of food forced nearly half of the men to turn back, and the remainder, though they reached Quebec, failed to surprise or take it. In December 1775, this remnant was reenforced by a body of New York and Connecticut men under General Montgomery of New York, which had captured the British posts at Chambly and St. John and occupied Montreal. But when the combined forces attacked Quebec on

New Year's Eve, they were beaten back, Montgomery was killed, Arnold was wounded, and the shattered invaders were too weak to try again until reenforcements could be obtained.<sup>3a</sup>

Congress made strenuous efforts to strengthen the expedition. It sent to Canada large reenforcements and an excellent general—Major-General John Thomas of Massachusetts—to take the chief command. As soon as it became certain that the British were withdrawing from Boston to Halifax and not to New York, it sent to Thomas' support an additional brigade under General John Sullivan of New Hampshire. But before this last installment could reach its remote destination, British reenforcements from Europe had arrived at Quebec (May 6, 1776), and the Americans were forced to retire. At the very time Congress was considering the Declaration of Independence, soon after adopted, it received word of the American retreat, of Thomas' death by smallpox, and of the utter disorganization of the army of invasion. General Philip Schuyler of New York could not leave Albany to replace Thomas, because his services were imperatively needed in forwarding men and supplies for the front, and, on June 17, 1776, Congress appointed Gates to this critical post.

By the time Gates reached his command, early in July, the American army of invasion had retreated to Crown Point. Even before its retreat across the border, Samuel Chase and Charles Carroll of Carrollton, sent by Congress to inspect and assist the army, had written from Montreal (May 27):

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<sup>3a</sup> In this and all future accounts of military operations during the first year of the war I follow Allen French's indispensable *The First Year of the American Revolution*.



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"We cannot find words strong enough to describe our miserable situation: you will have a faint idea of it if you figure to yourself an Army broken and disheartened, half of it under inoculation, or under other diseases; soldiers without pay, without discipline, and altogether reduced to live from hand to mouth." <sup>4</sup>

And, by the time Gates arrived, the American forces, according to one of the officers on the spot, were no longer "an army but a mob, the shattered remains of twelve or fifteen very fine battalions, ruined by sickness, fatigue, and desertion, and void of every idea of discipline or subordination." <sup>5</sup>

After Gates' arrival, the shattered army soon began to pull itself together. On July 26, Colonel Matthias Ogden of New Jersey wrote Aaron Burr from Ticonderoga:

"Generalship is now dealt out to the Army by our worthy and well-esteemed General Gates, who is putting the most disordered Army that ever bore the name into a state of regularity and defence. If our friends in Canada, commanded by Burgoyne, will wait a few days, we shall give them a very proper reception." (Force, 5, I, 603.)

A month later (August 21) Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Hartley of New Hampshire wrote from Crown Point to General Sullivan:

"General Gates is reforming the army and is very successful." (*Sullivan Papers*, I, 297.)

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<sup>4</sup> Force, *American Archives*, Fourth Series, Volume VI, column 590. Hereafter references to these printed archives will be abbreviated (using the present citation as an illustration) as follows: Force 4, VI, 590.

<sup>5</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel John Trumbull to his father, Governor Jonathan Trumbull, July 12, 1776, in John Trumbull, *Autobiography, Reminiscences and Letters*, p. 302. John was the painter; his father, the Revolutionary War governor of Connecticut.

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Soon after Gates arrived at Crown Point, Schuyler and he were called upon to make a difficult decision. If the Americans attempted to hold both Ticonderoga and Crown Point, there was serious danger that the British would be able to take each post piecemeal. It was therefore sound policy to abandon the weaker post and concentrate the entire army on the defense of the stronger, which was Ticonderoga. But the long struggle for both posts during the French and Indian War, in which many of the colonial troops had participated, had given these places a position of peculiar importance in the public eye, and the abandonment of either was certain to be unpopular. Moral courage, as well as sound judgment, was therefore required to reach the decision taken at a Council of War, attended by Schuyler, Gates, and three other general officers on July 7, 1776, to withdraw all of the troops from Crown Point. (Force 5, I, 233.)

Gates left a small force under Hartley at Crown Point as an outpost. But when, on the approach of the British, Hartley suggested that the post be reenforced (Force 5, II, 205) Gates firmly refused, saying (September 6, 1776):

"This moment I received your letter of this forenoon by the bearer. Instead of thinking the support of Crown Point an object upon this emergency, it is my positive orders to you, that in case of the defeat of our fleet, you immediately retire, with what is saved from their overthrow, to Tyonderoga; better fortune may await America, than that its naval force upon this Lake should be destroyed. Should unhappily that be the case, you are to obey my orders." (Force 5, II, 204.)

On October 14, 1776, the British defeated and destroyed the little American fleet, commanded by Benedict Arnold,

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and occupied Crown Point. But the garrison at Ticonderoga remained "in good spirits and think only of victory." Carleton and Burgoyne, after feeling out Gates' position and meeting a vigorous response, retired on October 28 without venturing to attack. A week later the British abandoned Crown Point and returned to their base in Canada. The northern army and Fort Ticonderoga, key to the passage from the St. Lawrence to the Hudson, were saved.<sup>6</sup>

Why has Gates not been given credit by the historians for this well-conducted and successful defense? No positive answer can be given. But considering the decisive weight accorded by most historians to the opinions of Washington, the explanation presumably lies in the following letter of July 19, 1776, from Washington to Gates:

"I expected 'ere this to have heard from you; as I have not I will open the correspondance by expressing my exceeding great concern on acct. of the determination of your board of General Officers, to retreat from Crown Point to Ticonderago; assigning (contrary to the opinion of all your Field Officers) for reason, that the former place is not tenable with your present force, or the Force expected.

"My concern arises from information, and a firm belief, that your relinquishing Crown point is, in its consequences, a relinquishment of the Lakes, and all the advantages to be derived therefrom; for it does not admit of a doubt, but that the Enemy will possess themselves, if possible of that pass (wch. is a key to all these Colonies) the moment you leave it, and thereby confine your Vessels to the narrow part of the Lake

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<sup>6</sup> The facts and the quotation in this paragraph are drawn from a series of letters from Gates to Schuyler in Force 5, II, 1080 and 1258 and Force 5, III, 502 and 526, and in a long letter of November 19, 1776, from Colonel Joseph Wood (of Pennsylvania) at Ticonderoga to Robert Morris, which is in the Greene Papers at the William L. Clements Library.

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in front of that Post, or, by having them in the Rear of it cut off all kind of Supplies from, and intercourse between your Camp and them; securing by this means a free and uninterrupted passage into the three New England Governments for Invasion thereof."

Washington wrote a similar letter to Congress on the same day.

The views expressed in these letters are, however, open to challenge. In the first place, Washington apparently thought that Crown Point was a well or easily fortified post whereas in fact it was not. Its weakness is described in letters from Schuyler and Gates to Washington of July 24 and July 29, 1776. (Force 5, I, 559-61 and 650-51.) Gates also wrote his friend General Israel Putnam, who was with Washington, the following amusing letter on the subject (August 11, 1776):

"Every fond mother dotes upon her booby, be his imperfections ever so glaring, and his good qualities ever so few. Crown-Point was not indeed your own immediate offspring, but you had a capital hand in rearing the baby. You cut all the logs, which are now rotten as dirt, and tumbled in the dust. No matter for that. Why should not you be fond of Crown-Point? If I live to be as old as you, I shall be as fond of Tyonderoga. I can assure you, I fancy already that my booby is a great deal handsomer than yours, and has a thousand excellences more than yours ever possessed. But don't be uneasy, the absurdities of your booby time will very soon obliterate; but mine will live for some future great engineer, like myself, to laugh at and despise. . . . Remember me affectionately, as you ought, and believe me, veteran, your sincere well-wisher and most obedient, humble servant, Horatio Gates." (Force 5, I, 900.)

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Furthermore, as pointed out in Gates' letter to Washington of July 29, not all of the field officers had opposed the evacuation; two of the most experienced of them—Colonels Arthur St. Clair and John De Haas of Pennsylvania—approved it. (Force 5, I, 650.) Finally, Washington apparently was not aware that if the British obtained a naval superiority on Lake Champlain, Crown Point would be cut off and its defenders doomed, a consideration later forcefully pointed out to him in letters of July 24 and August 6, 1776, from Schuyler. (Force 5, I, 559-61 and 794.)

It thus appears that there were strong grounds for the decision of Gates and the other general officers to concentrate the entire strength of the Northern Army on Ticonderoga and for Gates' refusal to permit any deviation from this decision.

Another possible reason for the historians' tendency to belittle Gates' achievement throughout the Revolution was his crushing defeat at Camden, South Carolina, in August, 1780. The best known account of Gates' behavior in this battle is that of Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Hamilton, who, on September 6, 1780, wrote to his fiancée, Elizabeth Schuyler:

"In the morning a battle ensued, in which the militia, and Gates with them, immediately ran away, and left the Continental troops to contend with the enemy's whole force.

"They did it obstinately, and probably are most of them cut off. Gates, however, who writes to Congress, seems to know very little what has become of his army. He showed that age and the long labors and fatigues of a military life had not in the least impaired his activity, for in three days and a half he reached Hillsborough, one hundred and eighty miles from the scene of action, leaving all his troops to take care of them-

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selves, and get out of the scrape as well as they could." (Lodge, *Works of Hamilton*, VIII, 13.)<sup>7</sup>

Others give a more favorable view of Gates' conduct. General Nathanael Greene, who superseded Gates, wrote him on October 5, 1781:

"After the action I had an opportunity of viewing the ground where you fought as well as the disposition and order of battle from all which I was more fully confirmed in my former sentiments that you was unfortunate but not blameable. And I am confident from all the enquiries I have since made you will acquit yourself with honor." (HM 22691, Greene file, Huntington Library.)

Furthermore, on August 14, 1782, Congressman John Rutledge of South Carolina wrote Gates, in a letter quoted in full in the Appendix of this chapter, that a Congressional Committee appointed to inquire into the defeat had completely exonerated him of any misconduct. According to Rutledge, the witnesses—officers who had been with Gates at Camden—spoke "in terms the most favorable" of "your order of march and battle, and your personal bearing in the action." (Sparks Papers, Harvard College Library.)

I have been unable to find any account by an unprejudiced eye-witness of the battle of Camden, and do not regard these later findings as decisive evidence of Gates' good generalship or bravery on that particular occasion. But whatever may have been Gates' conduct at Camden, the historians do him a grave injustice in ignoring or belittling his earlier and great contributions to the success of the American cause.

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<sup>7</sup> As brought out in the Appendix, Gates' long ride to Hillsborough was for a sound military reason.

## CHAPTER II

### GATES AND SCHUYLER

"Schuyler had by this time recovered,—or, to speak more accurately, had acquired,—the confidence of his soldiers. . . . The improved condition of the Northern army sorely disturbed the minds of his political adversaries, who were in a hurry to ruin him before he had the opportunity of winning a victory which would establish him permanently and inexpugnably in the gratitude of his countrymen. . . . Schuyler was deprived of his command; and, on the nineteenth of August, Gates arrived at Albany with a commission to supersede him." (Trevelyan, *The American Revolution*, 1918, IV, 153-55.)

IN 1777 Burgoyne again invaded New York from Canada, and on August 4, 1777, at one of the most critical moments of the campaign, Congress removed General Schuyler from the chief command of the northern army in favor of General Gates.<sup>1</sup> This action is commonly denounced as the climax of an intrigue between the New England members of Congress and Gates to ruin Schuyler. But here again the facts demonstrate the unfairness of the accepted view.

One of Congress' earliest and most serious problems was

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<sup>1</sup> The Resolves concerning this are recorded in the *Journals of the Continental Congress*, edited by Worthington Chauncey Ford. All the Resolutions of Congress are printed chronologically, so that the date of a Resolution is sufficient citation. Other matter in the Journals is occasionally referred to under the cue-title, "*Journals*."

the unpopularity of General Schuyler of New York with the New England troops who constituted the bulk of his army. Their aversion apparently had its origin in the fact that Schuyler had been one of the leaders in attempting to enforce New York's jurisdiction over territory, now the state of Vermont, much of which was occupied by New England settlers who had received their grants from New Hampshire. But their aversion was aggravated by Schuyler's tactless handling of General David Wooster of Connecticut in the 1775 Canadian campaign, and by his arrogance toward the men serving under him.

His waspish tone with Wooster appears in the correspondence between them during the Canadian campaign, published by Force (4, IV), while his attitude toward his soldiers is brought out in the following letter from the Reverend Cotton Mather Smith of Sharon, Connecticut, chaplain of Colonel Benjamin Hinman's Connecticut regiment, to his wife, written in July 1775:

"The Gen'l is somewhat haughty and overbearing. He has never been accustomed to seeing men that are reasonably well taught, and able to give a clear opinion, and to state their grounds for it, who were not also persons of some wealth and rank; and when our blacksmith C— came up to the Gen'l without any preliminaries to offer him some information and advice, but withal not disrespectfully, the Gen'l, albeit the information was of importance and should have speedy attention—spake very sharply to the poor man and bade him begone. He could easily have seen that the man meant no harm and was far more intelligent than the most of his 'stupid Dutchmen' (as I grieve to say that our N.E. men are too apt to call 'em) even when they are officers; but it was not until I had explained to him that the man was well descended and only a blacksmith by



## CHAPTER II

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reason that his grandfather's English estates had been forfeited to the crown, that the Gen'l could be prevailed upon to listen to him." (Tuckerman, *Life of Schuyler*, pp. 108-109.)

Some of Schuyler's troops apparently even suspected him of disloyalty, though patriot leaders did their best to dispel the unjustified suspicion.<sup>2</sup> In the letter just quoted from, Smith said:

"You wish to know if the rumors about General Schuyler are true, if he is secretly a Tory? Saying that you are requested to ask me. My dear wife, they are *not* true. Say this (to any who ask you) on my authority, for I speak whereof I do *know*. Gen'l Schuyler is as earnest a patriot as any in our land, and he has few superiors in any respect. I do grieve that so many of our New England men should so fail to do him justice. . . . Full one-third of my time is taken up in trying to make them see that we have no warrant for suspicions of him and every reason for the greatest confidence."

And over a year later (September 22, 1776) Governor Trumbull wrote to his son-in-law, William Williams, a member of Congress from Connecticut:

"Among other Letters from the Northward I have one from General Schuyler, inform<sup>s</sup> me that he has sent a Resignation of his Command to Congress, this Circumstance fills me with much Apprehension. I fear his Charactor has been greatly Injured by Artfull, Malicious & Designed Reports. In the whole Correspondence I have had with him, which you are much acquainted with, & know to be large—I have never had the least

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<sup>2</sup> The feeling of suspicion grew so strong that on June 7, 1776, the Committees of Safety of several towns in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, sent a letter to Washington warning him of the "great fears" respecting Schuyler's fidelity. (Force 4, VI, 744-45.)

Occasion to suspect his Zeal his Activity his Integrity or Ability—but have thot him to be a very valuable Man in the Charactor he has had the Honor to Sustain.” (Knollenberg Collection, Yale University Library)

In June 1777, Schuyler was in command of the northern department with headquarters at Albany, while General Arthur St. Clair of Pennsylvania was the commanding officer at Ticonderoga. Gates, who had come south the previous December, was in charge of the defenses of Philadelphia.<sup>3</sup> The reports from the north, and the inactivity of Howe<sup>4</sup> in New York and New Jersey, were so encouraging that on July 8 John Adams wrote his wife, Abigail:

“Our affairs are in a fine, prosperous train, and if they continue so, I can leave this station with honor. Next month completes three years that I have been devoted to the service of liberty. A slavery it has been to me, whatever the world may think of it.” (John Adams, *Familiar Letters*, p. 281.)

But only a few days later, Congress received the appalling news that St. Clair had abandoned Ticonderoga without a struggle, and that General Burgoyne was pressing forward to the Hudson. This was followed by a series of alarming letters from Schuyler to Washington, the substance of which was reported to Congress. On July 7, 1777, Schuyler wrote:

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<sup>3</sup> Gates brought seven regiments from the north to reenforce Washington in the critical days just before the battle of Trenton in December 1776. The details of this important episode are described in the Appendix to this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> There were three commanders named Howe in the American Revolution. General Sir William Howe and his older brother, Admiral Lord (Richard) Howe, were on the British side. Robert Howe, from North Carolina, was an American, Continental general. Unless otherwise indicated, “Howe,” in this book, refers to Sir William Howe.

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"My prospect of preventing them from penetrating, is not much. They have an army flushed with victory, plentifully provided with provisions, cannon, and every warlike store. Our army, if it should once more collect, is weak in numbers, dispirited, naked, in a manner, destitute of provisions, without camp equipage, with little ammunition, and not a single piece of cannon." <sup>5</sup>

July 9th:

"the country in the deepest consternation."

July 14th:

"Desertion prevails, and disease gains ground."

July 28th:

"So far from the militia that are with me increasing, they are daily diminishing, and I am very confident that in ten days, if the enemy should not disturb us, we shall not have five hundred left; and although I have entreated this and the Eastern States to send up a reinforcement of them, *yet I doubt much if any will come up, especially from the Eastern States, where the spirit of malevolence knows no bounds, and I am considered as a traitor.*" (Italics mine.)

August 4:

"Our Continental force is daily decreasing by desertion, sickness, and loss in skirmishes with the enemy; and not a man of the militia, now with me, will remain above one week longer."

and finally on August 13:

"We are obliged to give way and retreat before a vastly superior force, daily increasing in numbers, and which will be

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<sup>5</sup> This and the next four quotations are from letters printed in their appropriate chronological order in Jared Sparks, *Correspondence of the American Revolution*, Vol. I.

doubled if General Burgoyne reaches Albany, which I apprehend will be very soon." (Schuyler Letter Book, New York Public Library.)

Schuyler's statement as to the New Englanders' distrust of him was only too alarmingly confirmed by a letter from Governor Trumbull to Washington, dated July 25, 1777, in which Trumbull said:

"It is not wonderful that the minds of all friends to our cause should be agitated on the evacuation of the important posts at Ticonderoga, . . . which occasions some to cry, treachery; others, cowardice; all, blame. . . .

"P.S. . . . The cry of the people for an inquiry increases. It must be soon, full, and made public, or it will not be satisfactory. In the present situation at the northward it will be impracticable to procure men to go, *the distrust of the officers is so great.*" (The italics are Trumbull's.) (Massachusetts Historical Society *Collections*, 5th Series, X, 86 and 89.)

In view of Schuyler's despondent reports, the gloomiest of which were written after the date of Congress' vote to put Gates in his place, Trevelyan's statement that Schuyler had by that time "recovered or, to speak more accurately, had acquired," the confidence of his soldiers is demonstrably untrue. Congress had good reason to remove him, and the same is true of its appointment of Gates in his place.

On August 5, 1777, Samuel Adams wrote Samuel Freeman of Massachusetts:

"Gates immediately takes the Command of the Northern Army. He gains the Esteem of the Soldiers and his Success in restoring the Army there the last year from a State of Confusion & Sickness to Health & good order, affords a flattering Prospect." (*Writings of Samuel Adams*, III, 401.)

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On August 9, Henry Laurens, the leading member of Congress from South Carolina, wrote General Robert Howe of North Carolina:

"General Schuyler & St. Clair are ordered to headquarters. General Gates gone to take command of the northern department; 'tis agreed the New England men will chearfully follow him, although they had abandoned Schuyler in whom, rumour reported, they had no confidence." (Laurens Letter Book, No. 10, 1776-78, South Carolina Historical Society Library, Charleston, S.C.)

On August 11, Samuel Adams wrote Roger Sherman of Connecticut:

"Gates takes the Command there, agreeably to what you tell me is the Wish of the People; and I trust our Affairs in that Quarter will soon wear a more promising Aspect." (*Writings of Samuel Adams*, III, 405.)

And on August 18, Sherman himself wrote William Williams:

"I have no doubt but the Forts would have been defended if he" (Gates) "had continued there, for he could have had aid from the militia that was needful but none from N. England could be persuaded to join that army under the other commanders." (Sparks Papers, Harvard College Library.)

New England's response to Congress' action appears to have been as favorable as had been hoped for. James Warren of Plymouth wrote John Adams on September 4, 1777:

"The change in that department has given great satisfaction here and, with the enquiry ordered to be made, has again engaged the confidence of the people." (*Warren-Adams Letters*, I, 364.)

And on October 7, 1777, Colonel Timothy Bigelow of Worcester, Massachusetts, wrote his fellow townsman, Stephen Salisbury:

"I arrived in Camp last Saturday. . . . I am much pleased at finding such perfect union among the different corps of officers, it is the happiest camp I ever was in, officers and soldiers put the greatest confidence in the General. I imagine his treatment of the officers and soldiers is quite opposet to that of Schuyler's." (U. S. Revolution Papers, Vol. II, p. 117, American Antiquarian Society.)

Nor was the approval of the change limited to New Englanders. Colonel Udney Hay of New York wrote Governor Clinton of New York on August 13:

"I lament that I cannot give you a better account of things here. Misfortunes and fatigue have broken down the discipline and spirits of the troops and converted them in a great degree into a rabble. They seem to have lost all confidence in themselves and their leaders. The militia appear to be infected with the same spirit. Such as are with us, are good for nothing but to eat and waste and grumble, and those at home, think home safest. When I tell you that the sight of twenty or thirty Indians on our flank or rear, fills the whole camp with alarm; and that the act of shooting one from behind the walls of a log cabin, has been commemorated in General Orders, as a proof of extraordinary gallantry, you will be able to judge of what will probably happen, if by any accident, we are brought into close contact with Burgoyne's veterans. . . . Would to God Gates would arrive. He has the confidence of the Yankees and makes them do more and better, than any other person I have seen. The last year made a great change in their feelings and appearance, and may be equally fortunate again. Should he not come soon, your Excellency may expect to hear that our Head Quarters

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are removed to Albany." (Sparks Papers, Harvard College Library.)

And Clinton wrote James Duane, congressman from New York, on August 27:

"Gates has already reached the army and as I understand from Vischer and the Albany committee, things begin to wear a new face. No one talks any longer of retreating and means are already taking for an advance to Stillwater or yet nearer Burgoyne, if a good defensive position can be found. It is a pity that there should have been even one state opposed to the General's appointment. The officer who is willing to take up a game so nearly lost, ought to have all possible support and encouragement from his employers and besides this, his was perhaps the only name among our Major Generals, really and in all respects acceptable to our Eastern neighbors, on whose aid we must put our great dependence. Our friend Phil" (Schuyler) "has good qualities, but he has contrived to make himself disagreeable and suspected by the Yankees—prejudices not easily got over. His cursed attachment to the comforts of Albany and doing the fighting business by proxy for two campaigns, has destroyed him. How he could be so mistaken about the strength and defensibleness of the posts, is a matter of no small wonder to me." (Sparks Papers, Harvard College Library.)

There are letters indicating that some of Schuyler's supporters in Congress opposed his displacement. But, in view of this overwhelming evidence that the change was warranted by sound military considerations, one wonders how Trevelyan and the historians who share his views gained the impression that Congress removed Schuyler in favor of Gates out of spite.

## CHAPTER III

### GATES, WASHINGTON, AND BURGOYNE

"Gates, who had held the British army at his mercy . . . had made absurd terms and thrown away part of the fruits of victory." (James Truslow Adams, *The Burgoyne Expedition*, North American Review, 1927, Vol. 224, p. 380.)

"Note the generosity of the commander-in-chief. He . . . suggests the dangers to flow from the convention of surrender, without any criticism upon Gates's conduct." (Worthington C. Ford, *Washington at the Crisis of the Revolutionary War*. Century Magazine, 1911, Vol. 81, p. 662.)

HENRY LAURENS, the president of Congress, wrote Gates on November 5, 1777:

"Your name Sir will be written in the breasts of the grateful Americans of the present age and sent down to posterity in characters which will remain indelible when the gold shall have changed its appearance." (Wallace, *Laurens*, p. 262.)

And the facts of Gates' victory over Burgoyne justified this tribute.

Schuyler wrote to Duane on August 19, 1777, "I wish some of my friends had informed me who is to take the command. How I shall pity him altho' he should be my enemy, for he will find a choice of difficulties to encounter."



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(Lossing, *Schuyler*, II, 309.) Gates was the commander who faced and overcame these difficulties.

The plan of campaign adopted by Gates was simple but sound. He had his engineer, the Pole, Tadeusz Kosciuszko, pick out the narrowest pass that lay across Burgoyne's path to Albany. There, at Bemis Heights, three miles north of the present village of Stillwater, he had his men construct breast-works and entrenchments, extending from the Hudson on their right to the hills on their left, behind which they awaited Burgoyne's advance.

On September 17, Burgoyne arrived within sight of the American defenses, and two days later attempted to break through by attacking the Americans' left flank. But through his scouts, who kept watch of the British movements from treetops on the east bank of the river, Gates got timely word of the movement and sent out Morgan and his riflemen, supported by a regiment of light infantry under Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Dearborn of New Hampshire, to meet the British as they came through the woods. When the two detachments came to grips at Freeman's Farm, Gates and Burgoyne fed in additional troops, and a heavy engagement took place all the afternoon of September 19.<sup>1</sup> The Americans fell back to their lines at dusk, and Burgoyne claimed a victory. But it was a hollow one, for the British failed to penetrate the American lines, and lost nearly six hundred killed, wounded, and missing. The American loss was 320.

For almost three weeks, Burgoyne neither attacked nor

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<sup>1</sup> Gates has been excoriated for his treatment of Arnold, his second in command at Freeman's Farm, but, as shown in the Appendix to this chapter, he had good grounds for desiring to be rid of his unruly subordinate.

retreated, hoping the while that Howe or Clinton<sup>2</sup> would come to his rescue by falling on Gates' rear. Finally, on October 7, spurred by the realization that his officers and men were wasting away under the fire of the American sharpshooters, that there was a serious shortage of rations, and that fresh infusions of militia were daily adding to Gates' strength, he made another desperate but unsuccessful effort to get through or around the latter's left flank. This second effort was even a worse failure than the first, for in this battle—the battle of Bemis Heights—the depleted British force lost over four hundred against an American loss of less than a hundred. Burgoyne, his force reduced from 5,500 to 4,000 effectives, now abandoned hope of reaching Albany and fell back several miles northward to a strong position near the village of Saratoga (now Schuylerville), New York.<sup>3</sup> Gates, as soon as he had rested and fed his men, followed close behind, flung a detachment to the west of the British position, and sent another up the east bank of the river to cross over to Burgoyne's rear. Practically surrounded and greatly outnumbered, Burgoyne, on the 14th, sent a messenger to Gates to treat for terms of surrender. These were agreed upon and a convention was signed on October 16, 1777. The next day the British laid down their arms.<sup>3a</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> There were three generals named Clinton in the American Revolution. George and his older brother James, both from New York, were American generals. (George was also Governor of New York from 1777 to 1795.) Henry, after 1777 Sir Henry, was British. Unless otherwise indicated, "Clinton," in this book, refers to Sir Henry Clinton.

<sup>3</sup> The numbers of troops engaged and losses sustained, as stated in this chapter, are derived largely from Appendix II of Hoffman Nickerson, *The Turning Point of the Revolution*.

<sup>3a</sup> A good contemporary account of some of Gates' well-planned measures to defeat Burgoyne is in a letter of October 20, 1777, from Burgoyne

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Considering that Gates, though forced to rely mainly on militia,<sup>4</sup> not only had turned back the invaders but secured their surrender, it would seem that even the most unfriendly historian would be forced to give him praise rather than censure. But Gates, though he secured Burgoyne's surrender, did so only by accepting the condition that the surrendered troops should be permitted to return to England, thus paving the way for service in America of an equal number of troops previously occupied elsewhere. Gates' detractors have seized upon this condition to rob him of the credit for his victory. But the circumstances described below show that Gates was apparently justified in accepting the condition.

In July 1777, when Howe set out by water from New York to capture Philadelphia, he left a large body of troops behind under Clinton to hold New York City and, if possible, to aid Burgoyne. The latter possibility seemed remote, because Clinton would first have to break through the American defenses in the Highlands of the Hudson near Peekskill, New York, about forty miles north of Manhattan. But the prospect changed following Washington's defeat at the Brandywine on September 11. The next morning, Congress ordered General Putnam, in command at Peekskill, to send 1,500 men immediately to Washington's

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himself to Lord George Germain, Secretary of State for the Colonies, published in an Appendix to Burgoyne, *A State of the Expedition from Canada*, pp. xlvii-lviii. Channing, *History of the United States*, III, 276-78, has an excellent note, "Gates and Arnold," summarizing the facts entitling Gates to the principal credit for the victory over Burgoyne.

<sup>4</sup> Washington declared in a Circular letter of October 18, 1780: "I solemnly declare I never was witness to a single instance that can countenance an opinion of Militia or raw troops being fit for the real business of fighting." In some instances, however, as at Bennington and in the two actions against Burgoyne, they proved themselves valuable.

relief.<sup>5</sup> Two days later Washington ordered Putnam to send a thousand additional men, and, on September 23, repeated his order in the following letter:

"Genl. Howe, by various Manoeuvres and marching high up the Schuylkill, as if he meant to turn our Right Flank, found means by countermarching to pass the River, several Miles below us last night, which is fordable almost in every part, and is now fast advancing towards Philadelphia. I therefore desire, that without a moments loss of time you will detach as many effective rank and file, under proper Generals and other Officers, as will make the whole number, including those with Genl. McDougall, amount to Twenty five Hundred privates and Non Commissioned fit for duty. The Corps under Genl. McDougall, to my great surprise, by a Letter from him some days ago, consisted only of Nine Hundred and Eleven. . . . I must urge you, by every motive, to send on this Detachment without the least possible delay. No considerations are to prevent it. It is our first object to defeat, if possible, the Army now opposed to us here. That the passes in the Highlands may be perfectly secure, you will immediately call in all your Forces now on command at outposts. You must not think of covering a whole Country by dividing them; and when they are ordered in and drawn together, they will be fully competent to repel any attempt that can be made by the Enemy from below in their present situation."

Pursuant to this peremptory order, Putnam called in General Parsons' brigade from White Plains and Colonel William Malcom's regiment from the Clove, northwest of

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<sup>5</sup> Putnam, originally fourth in seniority of the Continental major-generals, was now Washington's second in command. Of his original superiors, Ward, seriously ill of a gall-stone, had retired; Lee, captured in December 1776, had not yet been exchanged; and Schuyler was temporarily suspended from command pending an investigation into the abandonment of Fort Ticonderoga in July 1777.

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Peekskill (Putnam to Malcom, September 27) and sent General James Varnum's brigade to Washington (Putnam to Washington, October 2, 1777).<sup>6</sup> At this critical moment, deprived of seasoned troops, Putnam received a letter dated September 27 from Parsons (Samuel, of Connecticut) stating:

"I have this moment received accounts by Mr. Fanning from New York, that sixty ships arrived the day before yesterday with recruits. He says he judges by the best intelligence he can get, they amount to three thousand and upwards, British and German troops." (Hall, *Parsons*, p. 115.)

These reenforcements would almost inevitably tempt Clinton to send out a detachment for the relief of Burgoyne, known to be hard pressed by Gates. Putnam immediately wrote Washington and Congress of his precarious situation. His letter to Washington is missing, but it was presumably similar to the one to Congress of September 29, in which he said:

"I am obliged to inform you that by Authentick intelligence received from L<sup>t</sup>. Fanning A prisoner of ours who is exchanged & came out from N York last Saturday, & divers other ways, Sixty Sail of Transports Arrived there last Thursday with three thousand british and German Troops. . . . The large detachments lately drawn from this post have reduced its Strength to about one thousand effectives Continental Troops & four hundred Militia Two hundred of whom are from this State one half of them without Arms, and what is worse it would be deem'd unsafe to trust them Notwithstanding my repeated urgent Applications to this & the State of Connecticut for the

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<sup>6</sup> Copies of all of Putnam's letters referred to in this chapter are in Ford, *Correspondence of Samuel B. Webb*, Vol. I. Colonel Webb (of Connecticut) was serving under Putnam at this time.

Assistance of the Militia No more has come in partly owing, I conceive to the large drafts for the Northward."

But Washington declined to order the return of the troops so imperatively needed for the protection of Gates' rear.<sup>7</sup> In response to Putnam's plea, he replied on October 1:

"I have yours of the 27th. and 29th. Ulto., and am glad to find that the Reinforcement I ordered, is in such forwardness. I make no doubt but some Troops have arrived at New York from Europe, but I am pretty certain they are not any thing like so numerous as your informant mentions. I know it has been their Custom thro' the whole Campaign, to swell their Reinforcements much beyond what they really were. If Genl. Burgoyne is defeated, or hindered from making any further progress, as we may reasonably infer he is from the last accounts, the North River will be no Object for the Enemy.<sup>8</sup> I rather think, if Genl. Clinton moves at all, it will be thro' Jersey to form a junction with Genl. Howe."

In spite of Washington's wishful thinking, Clinton, with three thousand men and a considerable flotilla of ships, was shortly on his way up the river. Washington, on learning of this, of course, realized that Putnam was faced with disaster, and that, if Clinton broke through, Gates too would be in dire peril.<sup>9</sup> He therefore (October 8) des-

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<sup>7</sup> For an interesting discussion of Washington's apparent errors of strategy in 1777 see Charles Francis Adams, "The Revolutionary Campaign of 1777," in his *Studies Military and Diplomatic*.

<sup>8</sup> Washington fails to state by what process of reasoning he reached this surprising conclusion. It is reminiscent of his statement to Congress, two days before Howe attacked in full force at Fort Washington (Chapter XIII), that the British operations there "can employ but a small part of their force."

<sup>9</sup> James Lovell of Massachusetts wrote Gates on November 5, 1777, that Washington had stripped Putnam "almost to the Skin, and if Harry Clinton had moved 8 Days sooner up the River, Albany & your army into the bargain would have been lost. He" (Putnam) "is a brave man

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patched the following letter to Governor William Livingston of New Jersey, asking him to rush the Jersey militia to Putnam's aid:

"Should any disaster happen, it is easy to foresee the most unhappy consequences. The loss of the Highland passes would be likely to involve the reduction of the forts. This would open the navigation of the river, and enable the enemy, with facility, to throw their force into Albany, get into the rear of General Gates, and either oblige him to retreat, or put him between two fires. The Success of the present attempt upon Peekskill, may, in its consequences, intirely change the face of our Northern affairs, and throw them into a very disagreeable and unfavorable train."

The time for reenforcements had, however, passed. Deprived of most of his seasoned troops, Putnam was unable to stop the British advance. On October 6 and 8, Clinton captured the American posts in the Highlands, and embarked a formidable detachment under General Vaughan and Captain Wallace of the navy for Albany. Putnam promptly warned Gates of his imminent danger as follows:

"Fishkill, eleven o'clock, A.M., 9 October, 1777.

"Dear General,

"In my letter of yesterday, I acquainted you of the enemy's having possession of Fort Montgomery. Yesterday they proceeded up the river with their ships, galleys, flat-bottomed boats, &c., and landed a body at Fort Constitution, took possession of that post, and played round the *chevaux-de-frise* a little. I expect every moment to have information that they are advancing up. . . . If they should proceed by water, I shall do

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and will not rest long without Enterprize tho' he cannot maintain posts and fight battles without soldiers." (Gates Papers, The New York Historical Society.)

## GATES, WASHINGTON, AND BURGoyNE

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every thing in my power to arrive at Albany before them. Weighing the *chevaux-de-frise*, I do not think is a matter of any moment to them. They can take a fair wind, and, with their flat-bottomed boats, which all have sails, go to Albany, or Half-Moon,<sup>10</sup> with great expedition, and, I believe, without any opposition." (Sparks, *Correspondence of the Revolution*, II, 538-39.)

Gates was therefore aware of this threat to his rear by the time (October 14) that Burgoyne suggested surrender.<sup>11</sup>

Under these circumstances Gates was fortunate to obtain even a conditional surrender, and Washington spoke no more than the obvious and simple truth in writing Richard Henry Lee on October 28, 1777:

"I am perfectly well satisfied that the critical situation in w<sup>ch</sup> Gen<sup>l</sup> Gates was likely to be thrown (by the approach of General Clinton up the N<sup>o</sup> River) would not allow him to insist upon a more perfect Surrender." (Ford, *Century Magazine*, Vol. 81, p. 663.)

Could any impartial historian, giving weight to all the pertinent facts, reach a different conclusion?

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<sup>10</sup> Half-Moon, now the village of Waterford, N. Y., is twelve miles north of Albany, at the confluence of the Mohawk with the Hudson, and only fifteen miles south of Bemis Heights.

<sup>11</sup> Fortunately for Gates, Burgoyne did not learn of Clinton's success until the night of October 15 and then only by rumor. Clinton had sent a message to Burgoyne on October 8 from Fort Montgomery saying, "*Nous y voici*, and nothing now between us but Gates," but the messenger was captured by the Americans. (*Correspondence of Samuel B. Webb*, I, 349.)



## CHAPTER IV

### DID GATES BETRAY WASHINGTON?

"Washington had stripped his army of an essential part of its strength to place Gates beyond any risk of defeat, and facing the British at Brandywine, he lost a battle because, as he thought, Gates had not promptly returned these loaned corps. No doubt exists of the intention of Gates in retaining them, in spite of the urgent sending of Hamilton by Washington, to hasten their return. To enjoy the full sweets of victory, to magnify his own success and importance, and to make sharper the contrast between his own victory and Washington's want of it, Gates was willing to risk the destruction of the 'main' army under Washington." (Worthington C. Ford, *Washington at the Crisis of the Revolutionary War*, Century Magazine, 1911, Vol. 81, pp. 661-62.)

IN August 1777, Washington sent a corps of five hundred riflemen, under Colonel Daniel Morgan of Virginia, to the northern army. (Washington to Putnam, August 16, 1777.) At the time this corps was detached, Howe's army, which had been inactive during the spring and early summer of 1777, was on the sea. On August 25, Washington learned that the British had disembarked near Elkton, Maryland, on Chesapeake Bay, about fifty miles southwest of Philadelphia. He sought to block Howe's path to Philadelphia at Brandywine Creek, twenty-five miles west of the city. Here, Howe

## DID GATES BETRAY WASHINGTON?

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decisively defeated the Americans on September 11. A week later, by clever maneuvering, the British managed to cross the Schuylkill unresisted and, on September 26, occupied Philadelphia unopposed.

On September 24, Washington wrote Gates:

"This Army has not been able to oppose Genl. Howe's with the success that was wished and needs a Reinforcement. I therefore request, if you have been so fortunate, as to oblige Genl. Burgoyne to retreat to Ticonderoga, or if you have not, and circumstances will admit, that you will order Colo. Morgan to join me again with his Corps. I sent him up, when I thought you materially wanted him, and if his services can be dispensed with now, you will direct his immediate return. You will perceive, I do not mention this by way of command, but leave you to determine upon it according to your situation. If they come, they should proceed by Water from Albany, as low down as Peeks Kill."

Five hundred seasoned Continental soldiers would be helpful in any theater of the war, but Morgan's backwoodsmen were peculiarly valuable in the rough, wooded country where they were being actively employed under Gates. Therefore, since he was given discretion, Gates acted with entire propriety in replying to Washington on October 5:

"Since the action of the 19th ultimo, the enemy have kept the ground they occupied the morning of that day, and fortified their camp. The advanced sentries of my pickets are posted within shot, and opposite the enemy's. Neither side have given ground an inch. In this situation, your Excellency would not wish me to part with the corps the army of General Burgoyne are most afraid of. From the best intelligence, he has not more than three weeks' provision in store; it will take him at least eight days to get back to Ticonderoga; so that, in a fortnight

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at farthest, he must decide whether he will rashly risk, at infinite disadvantage, to force my camp, or retreat to his den. In either case, I must have the fairest prospect to be able to reënforce your Excellency, in a more considerable manner than by a single regiment." (Sparks, *Correspondence of the Revolution*, I, 437.)

The promise to return Morgan's men as soon as practicable was kept. Burgoyne surrendered on October 17. On October 18 Gates' whole army moved toward Albany to meet the threat of Clinton's advance up the Hudson, and on the 24th "Col<sup>o</sup> Morgan march.d this Day with the Rifle men for the Southward"; that is, to rejoin Washington. (Henry Dearborn, *Journals*, Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1886-7, Second Series, III, 109.)<sup>1</sup> The other troops that might have been available for Washington were sent to help Putnam cope with Clinton who was still active on the Hudson below Albany.

Some weeks after Washington's defeat at Germantown on October 4, 1777, he and his officers decided they must have reenforcements in addition to those taken from Putnam. Therefore, on October 30 Washington sent Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Hamilton to Gates' headquarters at Albany, under the following letter of instructions:

"It having been judged expedient by the members of a Council of War held Yesterday, that one of the Gentlemen of my family should be sent to Genl. Gates, in order to lay before him the State of this Army and the Situation of the Enemy, and to point out to him the many happy consequences that will accrue from an immediate reinforcement being sent from the Northern Army; I have thought proper to appoint you to that

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<sup>1</sup> See to same effect, Gates to Washington, November 2, 1777 (*Writings of Washington*, IX, 466n.).

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duty, and desire that you will immediately set out for Albany, at which place, or in the neighborhood, I imagine, you will find General Gates."

By the time Hamilton reached Albany, in early November, most of the militia in the northern army had returned home. Morgan's corps had been sent back to Washington, and the remainder of the militia, together with Poor's and Learned's brigades of Continentals and a corps of Green Mountain Boys under Colonel Seth Warner, had been sent to reenforce Putnam.<sup>2</sup> This left Gates with only three Continental brigades: Paterson's, Glover's and Nixon's. On Hamilton's arrival, Gates immediately consented to send Paterson's brigade to Washington; the other two brigades to be retained for the protection of the upper Hudson. But swayed by Hamilton's importunity, Gates sent Glover's brigade too, and actually retained for himself *none of the militia and only one (Nixon's) of the five brigades of Continentals that had constituted his army at the surrender of Burgoyne*.<sup>3</sup> His decision was set forth in the following letter of November 7, 1777, to Washington:

"After sending upwards of five thousand men to the succour of the southern army, I hoped a further draft from this

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<sup>2</sup> The British had retired to New York City, and therefore Hamilton, on his way to Gates' headquarters, ordered most of these troops to join Washington immediately; an order which Putnam failed to comply with promptly. (Hamilton to Washington, November 2, 10, and 12, 1777. Sparks, *Correspondence of the Revolution*, II, 24, 32, and 36.)

<sup>3</sup> The facts concerning the disposition of Gates' troops will be found in letters of Hamilton to Washington of November (day not given) 1777, and November 10, 1777, and a letter from Hamilton to Putnam of November 9, 1777. (Sparks, *Correspondence of the Revolution*, II, 26, 33, and 549.) Washington wrote Congress on November 23 of the arrival of all four (Poor's, Learned's, Paterson's, and Glover's) brigades from the north.

## CHAPTER IV

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department would have become unnecessary; but . . . Col. Hamilton, after presenting me with your Excellency's Letter, verbally demanded that almost the whole of the Troops now in this Department, should be ordered to proceed directly for New Windsor. I told the Colonel that your Excellency's Orders should be obeyed; but that if my Opinion was to be taken on the Subject, I was entirely averse to more than one Brigade being sent from hence; as this City and Arsenal was not secure, with fewer Troops, than would then be left to guard them; and of Course, every good Effect, of the Ruin of General Burgoyne's Army, totally lost, should the Enemy succeed in an Attempt to possess this Town.

"Upon mature Consideration of all Circumstances, I have, nevertheless, ordered General Glover's Brigade to be added to General Patterson's, in reinforcement to your Army, and they will march, immediately down the East Side of Hudson's River, to Peek-Kill. Col. Hamilton, to whom I beg Leave to refer your Excellency, will report every thing that I wish to have you acquainted with, as well with respect to the present state, as the future operations this way." (Gates Papers, The York Historical Society.)

We are now in a position to compare the facts with the headnote. The latter states or implies that (1) Washington thought he had lost the battle of Brandywine because Gates had failed to return certain troops which Washington had lent him; (2) these troops had not been returned as promptly as they should have been; (3) the troops consisted of more than one corps ("these loaned corps"); (4) prior to his defeat at Brandywine, Washington had sent Hamilton to request the return of the troops in question; (5) Gates had rejected this request; and (6) Gates' motive for refusing to return these corps was to make sharper the contrast between his own victory and Washington's want of it, even

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at the risk of destroying the main army under Washington.

If this description of Gates' actions and motive were true, there would be substantial grounds for the condemnation of his character, however unwarranted the belittling of his abilities might be. But every one of the statements or intimations is unsupported or demonstrably untrue. Washington sent only one corps—the corps of five hundred riflemen—to the northern army. There is nothing in his letters or elsewhere indicating that he thought Gates had been dilatory in returning this corps or that its absence had been responsible for his defeat at Brandywine.<sup>4</sup> Such complaints, if made, would have been groundless, because Washington's request for the return of Morgan's corps was not made *until thirteen days after* his defeat at Brandywine. Gates returned the troops as promptly as Washington or anyone else familiar with his circumstances could have expected. Hamilton was not sent to Gates for additional troops until *more than six weeks after Brandywine*. When Hamilton appeared to ask for help, far from spurning his request, Gates responded by sending Washington two of his three remaining brigades.

The lay reader might well conceive that, to make out a striking case, I had drawn the headnote from the effusion of some sensational scribbler. But such is not the case. Worthington Chauncey Ford is a historical scholar of the first rank. Every student of American history is in debt to him for his editing of various manuscript collections, including Washington's own papers. He has been the head of the

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<sup>4</sup> Washington did write to Richard Henry Lee on October 28, 1777, complaining of Gates' failure to write him of Burgoyne's surrender (Ford, *Century Magazine*, Vol. 81, p. 663), but, as shown in Van Tyne, *The War of Independence*, p. 436, even this complaint was unjustified.

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Division of Manuscripts in the Library of Congress, editor of the Massachusetts Historical Society, and president of the American Historical Association. Indeed, it would be difficult to think of anyone whose words in the field of Revolutionary history would carry greater weight. It is therefore not surprising that not only the lay reader, but also the professional historian, is misled, as is strikingly illustrated in Sears' recent biography of Washington. The earlier writers were censorious enough of Gates' supposed incompetence and overambition, but Sears now sounds the more damning note of treason, saying:

"Such criticism . . ." (Dr. Rush's criticism of the poor discipline in Washington's army) "was as nothing to the treachery of Gates in denying men no longer needed at the North. Mr. Worthington C. Ford justly regards it as a deliberate risking of the cause in order to minister to his own inordinate vanity." (Sears, *Washington*, p. 201.)

Again and again, as I have read the histories dealing with Washington and the Revolution, I have wished the writer had had graven on his heart the noble passage from *Don Quixote* on the mission of the historian, who, says Cervantes, must never permit himself to:

"be biass'd either by Interest, Fear, Resentment, or Affection to deviate from Truth, which is the Mother of History." (*Don Quixote*, Motteux's translation, 1743, Vol. I, 75.)

Had there been a more sober dedication to truth, less shallow hero-worshipping, less striving for fine writing and dramatic effects, the histories of the American Revolution would have given us a very different picture from that which is so familiar to us of the relationship between Washington and some of his supposed rivals.

## CHAPTER V

### CONGRESS, CONWAY, AND GATES

"Notorious and implacable hostility to the Commander-in-Chief of the national forces was recognised as the special qualification for every office the holder of which would be in a position to annoy and thwart him. Conway was appointed Inspector General of the Army; Gates was brought down from Albany to York, and made President of the Board of War."  
(Trevelyan, *The American Revolution*, 1918, IV, 310.)

THE historians seem never to tire of belaboring the Continental Congress for having promoted Washington's supposed enemy, General Thomas Conway,<sup>1</sup> to a major-generalship in December 1777. But in assuming, as they do, that this action was taken for the purpose of thwarting the Commander-in-Chief at the expense of sound policy, the historians not only ignore the obvious fact that the members of Congress were as eager to win the war as Washington, but apparently overlook two other important considerations. The first is that Congress as the responsible head of the civil as well as of the military activities of the central

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<sup>1</sup> Conway was a French officer of Irish birth, who had had many years of service in the French infantry. Due to the law excluding Catholics from commissions in the British army, a great many Irish gentlemen served as officers in foreign armies, some of which had regiments (like the Dillon regiment of the French army) composed almost exclusively of Irish soldiers and officers.



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government was forced to take into account factors which were not strictly military and therefore outside Washington's immediate range of consideration. The second is that Conway was an able officer, and Washington's opposition to his advancement was apparently not generally known in Congress until after he had been promoted.

In 1777 Congress was harassed by a great influx of French officers from the West Indies and France, seeking high commands in the American army. To give them the posts they sought meant the creation of discontent among American officers, deprived of expected promotion, while to reject their demands meant the loss of French good will at a time when a continuation of France's secret aid and, if possible, an open alliance were of vital importance. Congress' desire to deal diplomatically—and fairly—with one of the most highly recommended of these officers, rather than a wish to harass the Commander-in-Chief, is the apparent explanation of its much-denounced appointment of Conway as inspector-general of the American army with the rank of major-general, on December 13, 1777.<sup>2</sup>

Congress' predicament with respect to the French officers had been explained to Washington in a letter from Richard Henry Lee as far back as May 22, 1777. Replying to Washington's report of the dissatisfaction among the American officers at the favor shown the Frenchmen, Lee had written:

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<sup>2</sup> The inspector-general was "To review, from time to time, the troops, and to see that every officer and soldier be instructed in the exercise and manoeuvres which may be established by the Board of War: that the rules of discipline are strictly observed, and that the officers command their soldiers properly, and do them justice." (*Journals*, December 13, 1777.)

"I beg you Sir to be convinced—That no desire *to get rid of importunity* has occasioned these appointments, but motives military and political merely.

"These Adventurers may be divided into three Classes, some who came early and without any recommendation but apparent zeal, with Commissions shewing that they had been in service. Others that brought with them recommendations from our good friend the Count D'Argoud General of Martinique, and from Mr. Bingham the Continental agent in that Island. A third Class includes those who come from France, generally under agreement with our Commissioners, or one of them at least. The strongest obligations rest upon us, (tho' the inconvenience is great) to make good engagements with the latter, and if the second had been disregarded we might have offended a good and powerful Friend in Martinique who has done many good offices there; or have brought our Agent into disrepute. Among the first Class, I really believe there are many worthless Men, and I heartily wish we were rid of them. . . . I will prevail with the Committee for foreign applications to furnish you with the most explicit views of Congress in ev[ery] appointment, as well as with the recommendations under which each appointment was and is made. We have written both to France and to Martinique to stop the furthe[r] flow of these Gentlemen here, and after the letters arrive I suppose we shall have no more. Many of the last Comers, are, I believe, Men of real merit, and if they will learn to express themselves tolerably in English, may be of service to the Army. The desire to obtain Engineers, and Artillerists was the principal cause of our being so overburthened. The first that came had sagacity enough quickly to discern our wants, and professing competency in these branches,—they were too quickly believed. And when our Commissioners abroad (in consequence of directions for this purpose) enquired for those Artists, Military Speculation was

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immediately up, and recommendations were obtained from persons of so much consideration in France, that the success of our applications then made it quite necessary not to neglect them. And at this moment I am apprehensive that the discontent of many may injure our cause abroad when we would wish it to stand well. As you express it Sir, the affair requires great delicacy in its management, as well on the account of our own Officers as on that of these Foreigners."

Before the influx could be stopped, a new problem was created by the arrival of Colonel Conway, Colonel Tronson du Coudray, Captain de Lafayette, and the latter's companion and friend, Lieutenant-Colonel de Kalb. Deane, the American Commissioner in Paris, had agreed with the last three that they were to be made major-generals, and had promised Conway that no one of equal or lower rank in the French army should be given a higher rank in the American army than he.<sup>3</sup>

Conway, who arrived first—in April 1777—was initially the least difficult of the four to provide for. He spoke English and was satisfied with the command of a brigade of Pennsylvania troops in Lord Stirling's division that happened to be open when he reached America.<sup>4</sup> Du Coudray was more of a white elephant. Silas Deane of Connecticut, the first commissioner of the United States to France, had agreed not only that he was to have the rank of major-

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<sup>3</sup> Deane to the Secret Committee of Congress, November 29, 1776 (*Deane Papers*, I, 381), and Conway to Congress, September 25, 1777, (Papers of the Continental Congress, No. 159, p. 453, Library of Congress).

<sup>4</sup> "Lord Stirling" was actually plain William Alexander of Basking Ridge, New Jersey, whom the irrepressible Charles Lee, in tribute to his bulk, dubbed "Alexander le Gros." But he laid claim to the long lapsed Scottish earldom of Stirling, and, though the British House of Lords had rejected his claim, was mi-Lorded by most of his associates in America.

general, but that his commission was to be dated back to August 1, 1776, and that he was to have chief command of the artillery. The fulfillment of this agreement would give him seniority over the veteran American major-generals, Sullivan and Greene, and place him directly over the able American chief of artillery, Brigadier-General Knox. Sullivan, Greene, and Knox threatened to resign if Deane's engagement was carried out. Congress was forced to compromise by giving Tronson du Coudray a nonretroactive commission as major-general and appointing him "Inspector-General of Ordnance" but without command of the artillery. It was saved the necessity of trying to reconcile him to this arrangement by his death by drowning.

The nineteen-year-old Lafayette, whose father-in-law, the Duc d'Ayen, was prominent at the court of Louis XVI, was pacified temporarily by being given the honorary rank of major-general, without command. This promotion from a captaincy in France to a major-generalship in America was so obviously a diplomatic rather than a purely military appointment that no serious problem was involved. But Lafayette's friend, Baron de Kalb,<sup>5-6</sup> presented a more perplexing problem, for his appointment to a major-generalship would inevitably lead not only to immediate dissatisfaction among the American officers but to an embarrassing demand for promotion from Conway, who had outranked him in the French army. On September 15 Congress gave de Kalb his promised major-generalship, and on September 25 Conway wrote to Congress claiming equal rank, pursuant to his understanding with Deane. (Papers of the Con-

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<sup>5-6</sup> De Kalb was only a self-styled member of the nobility. He was in fact plain Johann Kalb, of a peasant family of Hüttendorf, Germany.

tinental Congress, No. 159, p. 453, Library of Congress.)<sup>7</sup>

A solution appeared to offer itself in a resolution of Washington's General Officers favoring the establishment of an "Office of Inspector Genl. to our Army," for the purpose "principally, of establishing one uniform sett of Manoeuvres and Manual," which Washington enclosed in a letter to Congress of November 1, 1777. (*Writings of Washington*, IX, 441-42.) If Conway was made inspector-general, with the rank of major-general, he would have supervision of the instruction in manoeuvres and drill, but not command of a division. Consequently none of the brigadier-generals who had previously been senior to him would have to serve under him.

Conway's record both in France and in America indicated that he was especially well qualified for the office described in the resolution submitted by Washington. In writing Congress on November 29, 1776, Deane said:

"I have recommended several officers to your service, but none with greater pleasure, scarce any one with so much confidence of his answering great and valuable purposes, as the bearer, Colonel Conway, a native of Ireland, advanced in this service by his merit. . . . This gentleman has seen much service; his principal department has been that of training and disciplining troops, and preparing for action; and, from his abilities as well

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<sup>7</sup> There is a conflict of authority concerning whether Conway or de Kalb had the higher rank in the French army. (De Kalb had been appointed brigadier-general for service in the French colonies, just before he left for America, but this had no bearing on his rank in the French army proper.) Kapp in his *Life of John Kalb* implies (p. 121) that Conway was not de Kalb's senior, but Lasseray in his usually reliable *Les Français sous les Treize Étoiles* says that Conway was "rang de colonel," I, 160, and de Kalb only "rang de lieutenant-colonel," I, 247.

as from his long experience, he is considered as one of the most skilful disciplinarians in France." (*Deane Papers*, I, 380.)<sup>8</sup>

Conway's performance in America had borne out this recommendation. In a memoir sent from Philadelphia on September 12, 1777, written supposedly by the Chevalier Dubuysson, who had come over with Lafayette, it was reported that Conway's brigade was reputed to be the best instructed and disciplined brigade ("la brigade la mieux instruite et la plus diciplinée") in the army. (Stevens, *Facsimiles*, VIII, No. 754.)<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, in its first real test—at Brandywine—Conway's brigade had made a fine showing. In his description of that battle, drafted in October 1777, General Sullivan, who was in command of the right wing, which included Conway's brigade, stated that some of "Lord Sterlings Division & particularly Conways Brigade" had "remarkably Distinguished themselves." (*Sullivan Papers*, I, 474.) And the fact that this brigade was chosen to lead the attack at Germantown a few weeks later (Washington to Congress, October 5, 1777) is convincing evidence of the high esteem in which it was held.

Lafayette, who had fought with Conway at Brandywine, wrote enthusiastically to Washington on October 14, 1777:

"General Conway is a so brave, intelligent and active officer that he schall, I am sure, justify more and more the esteem of the army and your approbation." (Lafayette Correspondence, Vol. I, Pierpont Morgan Library.)

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<sup>8</sup> A letter of January 9, 1777, from Nicholas Rogers to Deane and one of May 7, 1777, from George Lupton to William Eden give further evidence of the high esteem in which Conway was held as a soldier in France. (Stevens, *Facsimiles*, VI, No. 620, last page, and II, No. 154, p. 3.)

<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere in his memoir Dubuysson asserted that Conway was successful with his brigade because (translating) "instead of leaving it idle in camp he manoeuvres and instructs it himself."

and Sullivan, who had been with Conway both at Brandywine and at Germantown,<sup>10</sup> wrote John Adams on November 10, 1777:

"Nothing has given me more uneasiness than to find General Conway is about leaving the army, on account of some French gentlemen, who were inferior in rank to him while they remained in their own country, being promoted over him. This, he says, was the only thing he guarded against in his agreement with Mr. Dean and with Congress; . . .

"I have been in two actions with General Conway, and am confident no man could behave better in action. His regulations in his brigade are much better than any in the army, and his knowledge of military matters in general, far exceeds any officer we have; and I must beg leave to observe, that it is worth the consideration of Congress to retain him.

"P.S.—If the office of Inspector-General, with the rank of Major-General, was given him, I think our army would soon cut a different figure from what they now do." (*Sullivan Papers*, I, 577.)

Furthermore, the president of Congress, Henry Laurens of South Carolina, who had just had a chance to see Conway face to face, had been favorably impressed by him. This appears from the following letter of December 6, 1777, from Laurens to Lafayette:

"General Conway has devoted much of his time in York" (to which Congress had moved after the fall of Philadelphia) "to our Marine Committee . . . had he served any particular State in the Union with the Same Zeal & good effect which have been conspicuous & universally acknowledged in his Military

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<sup>10</sup> Conway's observations on these battles are included in an interesting letter of November 14, 1777, from him to Charles Carroll, published in Rowland, *Carroll*, I, 225-230.

efforts in the Service of the thirteen.—a deputation would have waited on him long before this hour, either with honorable propositions for retaining, or Commands to take leave of him, in terms Suitable to his Merits.” (Laurens Letter Book, No. 10, 1776–78, South Carolina Historical Society Library.)

A possible reason to conceive that Congress’ object in promoting Conway was to harass Washington is that, on October 17, 1777, Washington wrote Richard Henry Lee:

“General Conway’s merit . . . as an Officer, and his importance in this Army, exists more in his own imagination, than in reality: For it is a maxim with him, to leave no service of his own untold, nor to want any thing which is to be obtained by importunity: But, as I do not mean to detract from him any merit he possesses, and only wish to have the matter taken up upon its true Ground, after allowing him every thing that his warmest Friends will contend for, I would ask, why the Youngest Brigadier in the service (for I believe he is so) should be put over the heads of all the Eldest? and thereby take Rank, and Command Gentlemen, who but Yesterday, were his Seniors; Gentlemen, who, I will be bold to say (in behalf of some of them at least) of sound judgment and unquestionable Bravery?”<sup>11</sup>

Even if these views of Washington had been generally known, it would be unfair to assume that Congress was motivated by a desire to annoy and thwart him. For, in view

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<sup>11</sup> Lee must have considerably discounted Washington’s extreme statement on this point, since Congress’ recent action in making de Kalb a major-general had not been followed by a single resignation. (None of the brigadiers resigned as a result of Conway’s appointment, either.) Furthermore, Conway was older in years than most of the brigadiers, had seen incomparably more service than any of them except possibly General de Fermoy, and, even technically speaking, despite Washington’s belief to the contrary, was not the “Youngest” (junior) brigadier. Both Pulaski and Stark had been commissioned after him.



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of the importance of maintaining French good will, of carrying out the engagement of its commissioner, and of Sullivan's strong testimony in Conway's behalf, there would have been ample justification for Congress' not giving decisive weight to Washington's views.

But when it promoted Conway, Congress apparently had no knowledge of Washington's unfavorable opinion of him. Lee, who had recently left for Virginia, had not, as far as is known, divulged Washington's privately expressed opinion to any of his fellow members of Congress. This is indicated by the fact that not one of the numerous surviving letters written by them in the fall of 1777 discloses any knowledge or even suspicion of friction between Washington and Conway. Furthermore, it is difficult to believe that President Laurens would have written that Conway's merits were "universally acknowledged" (letter of December 6, 1777, to Lafayette) if he had known Washington's opinion to the contrary. The truth seems to be that all or substantially all the members of Congress were in the same position as Congressman Abraham Clark of New Jersey, who, in writing Stirling about Conway, on January 15, 1778, said:

"Your Lordship mentions the want of *Military merit* in a Gentleman lately promoted; I always before heard him mentioned as having great Military Abilities, and this was all I had ever heard concerning him. . . . was the business now to be done Congress would probably Act otherwise."

There is likewise no basis for the view that the purpose of Congress in establishing the Board of War, with Gates as its president, was to annoy or thwart Washington. On the contrary, it appears that Congress was trying in good

faith to respond to Washington's own urgent appeal for improvement in the administration of the War Department.

Congress was both legislature and executive. Its "President" was merely its presiding officer with no executive powers or functions. The executive functions were exercised through committees chosen by Congress from among its members. The most important committee, the Board of War and Ordnance, had a secretary who was not a member of Congress and devoted all his time to the Board. But even so, the Board's work was too arduous and technical to be dealt with successfully by a Congressional committee, and proposals for the creation of a full-time body composed of persons familiar with the various staff departments of the army had long been under discussion. Action was precipitated by a letter of October 13, 1777, from Washington to Congress, in which, after describing the virtual break-down of army supplies, he said:

"What New expedient Congress can devise for more effectually answering these demands I know not, persuaded as I am, that their closest attention has not been wanting to a matter of so great importance. But circumstanced as we are, I am under an absolute necessity of troubling them, that if any new source can be opened for alleviating our distresses, it may be embraced, as speedily as possible. For it is impossible, that any Army so unprovided can long subsist, or act with that vigor which is requisite to ensure success."

Four days later, Congress established a Board of War to consist of three persons not members of Congress. The duties of the Board, as set forth in resolutions adopted at the same time, related to the administration, as distinguished from the military operations, of the army. On November

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7, the Board was filled by the election of General Thomas Mifflin of Pennsylvania, Colonel Timothy Pickering of Massachusetts, and Lieutenant-Colonel Robert H. Harrison of Maryland. Mifflin had recently retired—some say sick, others disgruntled—from the post of quartermaster-general; Pickering was the adjutant-general; and Harrison was Washington's military secretary. But Harrison, who was only thirty-two and inexperienced in business affairs, asked that he be excused from serving "from a sense of his being unequal to the various important duties of the office" (*Journals*, November 21, 1777), and Joseph Trumbull of Connecticut, former commissary-general of the army, was substituted in order to secure "a person acquainted with the commissarial business." (*Journals*, November 24, 1777.) Furthermore, on November 27, two additional members of the Board were appointed: Gates and Richard Peters of Pennsylvania. Gates had been conspicuously successful as the original adjutant-general of the American army, and Peters had had a good record as secretary of the old Board of War. Gates was at the same time named president of the Board.

Congressman William Williams of Connecticut wrote the next day to Trumbull concerning the new Board as follows:

"As You call your Self a plaguey obstinate Fellow I had some Fears lest You sho<sup>d</sup> injure your Self, your Father, and your Friends and more especially your Country, by refusing her Call and I trust that of Providence on this Occasion. you may perceive how honorable and important Congress account the Business by the Generals employed, and by the inclosed Resolve. . . . Congress expect your usefullness especially in the Commissary Department, and assistance to regulate the abuses

of that and so for the other great Departments, in which other of the Gent. are particularly versed. it is of importance to be called by every voice as you was to this honble. Service and Col Read <sup>12</sup> was sacrificed to You, supposing You co<sup>d</sup> not sit together. The Department is of very great Moment most certainly, and never was or co<sup>d</sup> be properly executed by a Board consisting of Members of Congress, if for no other reason it was impossible to give proper Attention and Time to both, and They are most heartily weary of trying."

It is reasonable to believe that Williams was speaking the truth, and that the view that the Board, with its personnel, was a sinister scheme of Congress to persecute or overthrow Washington, is not well founded.

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<sup>12</sup> Colonel Joseph Reed of Philadelphia, who from the first had been considered as a possibility for the Board (Richard Henry Lee to Washington, October 20, 1777) was on bad terms with Trumbull presumably as a result of the publication in a Tory newspaper of an intercepted letter of November 18, 1776, from Trumbull to William Williams. In his letter Trumbull referred to Reed's "stinking pride" and said that Reed was "universally hated and despised." (Force 5, III, 1498.)

## CHAPTER VI

### WASHINGTON AND CONWAY COLLIDE

"This" (Washington's) "curt note fell upon Conway with stunning effect. It is said that he tried to apologize, and he certainly resigned. As for Gates, he fell to writing letters . . . and writhed most pitiably under the exposure. Washington's replies are models of cold dignity, and the calm indifference with which he treated the whole matter . . . is very interesting." (Henry Cabot Lodge, *George Washington*, American Statesmen Series, 1889, I, 215.)

THE controversy between Washington, and Conway and Gates, arising out of a gossiping letter from Conway to Gates, has been played up as an affair in which Washington shone with particular luster. But to my mind his behavior suggests President Theodore Roosevelt's celebrated tantrum over General Miles' criticism of the navy.<sup>1</sup>

During the eighteenth century it was customary for offi-

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Dooley described this scene as follows: "'Gin'ral, I don't like ye'er recent conduct,' he" (the President) "says, sindin' th' right to th' pint iv th' jaw. 'Ye've been in th' army forty year,' he says, pushin' his head into th' grate, 'an' ye shud know that an officer who criticizes his fellow officers, save in th' reg'lar way, that is to say in a round robin, is guilty iv I dinnow what,' he says, feedin' him with his soord. 'I am foorced to administher ye a severe reproof,' he says. 'Is that what this is?' says Gin'ral Miles. 'It is,' says th' prisidint. 'I thought it was capital punishment,' says Gin'ral Miles as he wint out through th' window pursooed be a chandelier." (Finley Peter Dunne, *Observations by Mr. Dooley*, pp. 59-60.)

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cers to criticize their fellow officers, whether superiors or inferiors, with the utmost freedom; the critic might find himself involved in a duel, but censorship was apparently unknown.<sup>2</sup> Thus accustomed to write with perfect frankness, General Conway told Congress in a letter of September 25, 1777, that his division commander, Stirling, could not "Do any thing reasonable after Dinner," that is, was a drunkard, and that even the other higher officers in Washington's army had no "notion of Leading and forming a Body of men before the ennemy." (Papers of the Continental Congress, No. 159, p. 454, Library of Congress.) About two weeks later, the date not definitely identifiable, Conway wrote Gates:

"What pity there is but one Gates! But the more I see of this army, the less I think it fit for general action under its actual chiefs and actual discipline. I speak to you sincerely and freely, and wish I could serve under you." (Copied from the original by Henry Laurens, President of Congress, who gave the extract to Washington's aide-de-camp, Lieutenant-Colonel John Fitzgerald, who enclosed it in a letter of February 16, 1778, to Washington. Sparks, *Writings of Washington*, V, 511.)

Gates' adjutant, Colonel James Wilkinson of Maryland, saw or heard of Conway's letter to Gates, and, on his way to announce Burgoyne's surrender to Congress, mentioned it to General Stirling's aide-de-camp, McWilliams, who told of it to Stirling. He passed the story on to Washington, saying: "The inclosed was communicated by Colonl.

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<sup>2</sup> General Forbes, one of the most gallant officers in the French and Indian War, suffers in reputation to this day from Washington's slurring (and unjust) letters about him, written while Washington was serving under him. Washington to Robinson, September 1, 1758, and to Sally Fairfax, September 25, 1758; also Forbes to Abercromby, August 11, 1758. (James, *Writings of Forbes*, pp. 172-73.)

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Wilkinson to Majr. McWilliams, such wicked duplicity of conduct I shall always think it my duty to detect." (Quoted in a letter of January 4, 1778, from Washington to Gates; *Writings of Washington*, X, 263.) On receipt of this letter from Stirling, Washington immediately wrote Conway (November 9) the following curt note:

"Sir: A Letter which I receivd last Night, containd the following paragraph.

"In a letter from Genl. Conway to Genl. Gates he says: 'Heaven has been determind to save your Country; or a weak General and bad Councillors would have ruind it.'

"I am, Sir, Yr Hble Servt."

On the same day, Conway replied:

"Sir

I wrote to General Gates by Major Troop the 9th or 10th of Last Month from reading. after congratulating him upon his success at the northward, and returning him thanks for the civility he had shew'd to my Brother in Law, I gave him an account of the operations of this army. i Spoke my mind freely. I found fault with several measures pursued in this army; but I will venture to say that in my whole Letter the paragraph of which you are pleas'd to send me a copy can not be found. . . . I Defy the most keen and inveterate Detractors to make it appear that i levell'd at your Bravery, honesty, honour, patriotism or judgment of which I have the highest sense. correspondence between general officers in all army's is encourag'd rather than Discountenanc'd because from this intercourse of ideas something useful might arise. although this inquisition in Letters from particular to particular will be a proceeding in this country of which there are few instances in Despotick and tyrannical Governments, still in order that the least suspicion should not remain in your Excellency's mind about my way

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of thinking, I am willing that my original letter to General Gates should be handed to you. this i trust will convince you of my way of thinking." (Papers of George Washington, Vol. 60, Library of Congress.)

As far as appears Washington did not reply to Conway, and the contents of his letter to Gates, beyond the brief excerpt previously quoted, are not known. Sometime before January 27, 1778, Gates returned the letter to Conway who, to prove that it did not contain the rumored aspersions on Washington, proposed to publish it. But he was dissuaded from doing so by Henry Laurens and other members of Congress on the ground "that such a measure would inform the enemy of a misunderstanding prevailing among the generals of the American army." (Conway to Washington, January 27, 1778, Sparks, *Writings of Washington*, V, 502.)

To avoid possible injustice to Conway and the risk of offending Gates, Washington obviously ought to have deferred writing Conway until he had inquired from Gates whether Stirling's information was correct, and, if so, whether Gates was willing to have Conway's personal letter to him used as the basis for a reprimand. But Washington, as we have seen, did nothing of the sort, and Gates heard of the matter for the first time from others. Apparently inferring from Washington's procedure that the latter was taking a fling at him as well as at Conway, Gates wrote to Washington, complaining of the imagined rifling of his correspondence, and sent a copy of his letter to Congress.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Washington later (January 4, 1778) wrote Gates that he had thought that Wilkinson's remarks about the Conway letter had been made at Gates' suggestion "with a friendly view to forewarn, and consequently forearm me, against a secret enemy." But Gates can hardly be blamed for having himself failed to conceive of this bizarre explanation!



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This letter, which was read in Congress on December 23, 1777, of course, made known the fact that Washington was at odds with Conway and apparently with Gates, too.

At this juncture, Lafayette, who must have been non-plussed to discover that Conway, whom he had been praising, was anathema to the Commander-in-Chief, whom he had been courting, wrote Washington (December 30) as follows:

"My Dear General,—I went yesterday morning to headquarters with an intention of speaking to your excellency, but you were too busy, and I shall lay down in this letter what I wished to say. . . . Take away, for an instant, that modest diffidence of yourself, (which, pardon my freedom, my dear General, is sometimes too great, and I wish you could know, as well as myself, what difference there is between you and any other man,) you would see very plainly that if you were lost for America, there is no body who could keep the army and the revolution for six months. . . . General Conway says he is entirely a man to be disposed of by me. He calls himself my soldier, and the reason of such behaviour to me is, that he wishes to be well spoken of at the French court, and his protector, the Marquis de Castries, is an intimate acquaintance of mine; but since the letter of Lord Stirling I inquired in his character. I found that he was an ambitious and dangerous man. He has done all in his power, by cunning manoeuvres, to take off my confidence and affection for you. His desire was to engage me to leave this country. . . . The reason of my fondness for Conway was his being by all means a very brave and very good officer. However, that talent for manoeuvres, and which seems so extraordinary to congress, is not so very difficult a matter for any man of common sense who applies himself to it. . . . I have the warmest love for my country and for every

good Frenchman; their success fills my heart with joy; but, sir, besides, Conway is an Irishman,<sup>4</sup> I want countrymen, who deserve, in every point, to do honour to their country. . . .

"With the most tender and profound respect, I have the honour to be, &c." (Lafayette, *Memoirs*, I, 134-39.)

Conway was unlucky enough to pick this moment to present himself at headquarters. In response to a message from him that he was eager to begin his new job of instructing the troops, Washington (December 30) replied that he must await the arrival of "a Sett of Instructions" from the Board of War and closed with an intimation that Conway's promotion over his fellow brigadiers had been unmerited.

Conway replied the next day:

"the General and universal merit, Which you Wish every promoted officer might be endowed with, is a rare gift. We see but few men of merit so generally acknowledged. We know But the great frederick in europe, and the great Washington in this continent. I certainly never was so rash as to pretend to such a prodigious height, neither Do I pretend to any superiority in personal qualities over my Brother Brigadiers for Whom I have much regard. but you, sir, and the great frederick know perfectly well, that this trade is not Learn'd in a few Months. I have served steadily thirty years. that is, before some of my comrades Brigadiers Were Born. therefore I Do not think that it will be found Marvellous and incredible, if I command here a number of men Which falls much short of What I have commanded those many years in an old army." (*Writings of Washington*, X, 228n.)

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<sup>4</sup> It would be interesting to know how largely the unfavorable light in which Conway has been presented is attributable to anti-Irish bias. William Roscoe Thayer, for example, said: "He" (Conway) "seems to have been one of the typical Irishmen who had no sense of truth, who was talkative and boastful." (Thayer, *George Washington*, p. 112.)

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He wrote Sullivan too (see Appendix), and on January 10, 1778, wrote Washington:

"Sir; I remain in a state of inaction until such time as your Excellency will think fit to employ me. I understand that your aversion to me is owing to the letter I wrote to General Gates. I have made you a candid answer upon that subject, and such an answer as must satisfy you and every man of a liberal disposition. There is not a subaltern in Europe but what will write to his friends and acquaintances, and mention freely his opinion of the Generals and of the army; but I never heard that the least notice was taken of these letters. Must such an odious and tyrannical inquisition begin in this country? Must it be introduced by the Commander-in-chief of this army raised for the defence of liberty? It cannot be, and I am satisfied you never had such thoughts.

"Supposing you, Sir, to be where I am sure you do not mean nor wish to be, supposing you to be an absolute king, yet it would be more generous, more to your glory and interest, to despise the vile reports of any officious sycophant, than to gratify your resentment against any officer concerned in such reports." (Sparks, *Writings of Washington*, V, 494-95.)

Conway paid for the satisfaction of sending these sarcastic and impertinent letters by bringing down on himself such a deluge of abuse from Washington and the coterie of officers in what he called his "military family" as fell to the lot of no other during the Revolution. Washington himself in his letter to Gates of January 4, 1778, previously referred to, denounced Conway as:

"a secret enemy; or, in other words, a dangerous incendiary; in which character, sooner or later, this Country will know Genl. Conway."

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And John Laurens wrote his father January 3, that the latter might think Washington had shown "too great forbearance" to Conway

"when you learn that Gen<sup>l</sup> Conway was charged with cowardice at the battle of German Town, and that a gentleman of rank and reputation, desir'd to be called upon as an evidence." (Simms, *Laurens Army Correspondence*, p. 102.)

By the time another few months had rolled around, young Laurens had become convinced that he himself was a witness to Conway's alleged cowardice. He wrote his father on June 9, 1778:

"As for fighting, I know by what I saw at German Town, that his stomach is not so keen set for it as he pretends." (Simms, *Laurens Army Correspondence*, p. 180.)

Lafayette, who had warmly recommended Conway's promotion in a letter to President Laurens of October 18, 1777, now wrote Laurens (about January 26, 1778):

"I know that connway will sacrifice honor, truth, and every thing respectable to his own ambition and desire of making a fortune." (*South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, VII, 6 and 127.)

Alexander Hamilton wrote Governor Clinton of New York on February 13:

"Have you heard any thing of Conway's history? He is one of the vermin bred in the entrails of this chimera dire, and there does not exist a more villainous calumniator and incendiary." (Lodge, *Works of Hamilton*, VII, 539-40.)

And General Greene wrote his cousin William Greene of Rhode Island in March 1778:

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"General Conway has been a great incendiary in our army. . . . He was lately made a major-general, which he obtained by the most dirty artifice." (Greene, *Life of Greene*, II, 31.)

Indeed, the persecution by those surrounding Washington reached such a point that it was thought risky to say anything whatsoever in Conway's favor, as appears from a letter of April 29, 1778, from John Jay to Gouverneur Morris. Jay, after speaking favorably of Conway's services at Albany, where he was then stationed, remarked: "of this say nothing." (Johnston, *Correspondence of John Jay*, I, 180-81.) <sup>5</sup>

But by the time Jay's letter was written, Conway was no longer in the army. On January 2, 1778, Washington had transmitted to Congress copies of his recent correspondence with Conway, including the latter's sarcastic letter of December 31, and Congress necessarily agreed with Congressman Abraham Clark of New Jersey, that "the Authority and Credit of the Commander in Chief must be supported." (Clark to Stirling, January 15, 1778.) <sup>6</sup> On January 23, Congress transferred Conway to a new and distant scene of action—the upper Hudson—for a raid on Montreal, discussed in Chapter VIII. When that project failed to materialize, Congress left Conway in Albany with little to do. Disgruntled, he offered his resignation, which, to his disappointment, was promptly (April 28, 1778) accepted. He

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<sup>5</sup> An interesting correspondence between Governor Clinton and Conway while he was stationed at Albany from March to May 1 is published in *Public Papers of George Clinton*, III.

<sup>6</sup> Congress was also presumably influenced by a letter of January 6, 1778, signed by nine brigadier-generals in Washington's army, over whom Conway had been promoted, protesting against being required to serve with an officer formerly their junior. (Papers of the Continental Congress, No. 162, pp. 276-79, Library of Congress.)

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returned to France, and there had a distinguished army career. (Lasseray, *Les Français sous les Treize Étoiles*, I, 160-66.)

Washington was at first delighted with Conway's successor, Baron von Steuben<sup>7</sup> (Washington to Congress, April 30, 1778), but when the latter asked for a transfer to a command in the line, Washington soured of him too, and wrote Gouverneur Morris (July 24, 1778):

"I do most devoutly wish, that we had not a single foreigner among us, except the Marquis de Lafayette, who acts upon very different principles from those which govern the rest."

Considering that Lafayette had from the first demanded an honorary major-generalship and then importuned for command of a division, the only perceptible difference between his principles and those of the other foreign officers was that he waived the (to him) negligible salary attached to his rank in the American army and sedulously flattered his commander-in-chief. A striking illustration of this appeared in Lafayette's letter to Washington of December 30, 1777, quoted on page 54. In his memoirs, written in the third person, Lafayette describes his first meeting with Washington as follows:

"'We must feel embarrassed,' said General Washington, on his arrival, 'to exhibit ourselves before an officer who has just quitted French troops.' 'It is to learn, and not to teach, that I come hither,' replied M. de Lafayette; and that modest tone, which was not common in Europeans, produced a very good

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<sup>7</sup> I have accepted the name that was used by Steuben himself and most of his contemporaries. He was, however, no baron, and even the "von" had been self-assumed by his grandfather, as shown in Palmer, *General von Steuben*, pp. 16-22.

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effect." (*Lafayette, Memoirs, Correspondence and Manuscripts of General Lafayette*, I, 19.)

But while the Washington-Conway affair was thus quickly resolved to the apparent satisfaction of everyone but Conway, it led to an unfortunate exchange of letters between Gates and Washington. Gates, as we have seen, wrote Washington asking his assistance in identifying the person who had divulged the alleged contents of Conway's private letter to him, and Washington replied on January 4, 1778, telling him that Wilkinson had been the informant. To this statement Washington added the following ill-advised remarks:

"Thus Sir, with an openness and candour which I hope will ever characterize and mark my conduct have I complied with your request; . . . I never knew that General Conway (who I viewed in the light of a stranger to you) was a corrispondant of yours, much less did I suspect that I was the subject of your confidential Letters; pardon me then for adding, that so far from conceiving that the safety of the States can be affected, or in the smallest degree injured, by a discovery of this kind, or, that I should be called upon in such solemn terms to point out the author, that I considered the information as coming from yourself; and given with a friendly view to forewarn, and consequently forearm me, against a secret enemy; or, in other words, a dangerous incendiary; in which character, sooner or later, this Country will know Genl. Conway. But, in this, as in other matters of late, I have found myself mistaken."

Washington's assumption that he had been the subject of Gates' confidential letters was, of course, gratuitous, for the fact that Conway had written to Gates did not necessarily signify that Gates had written Conway, much less

that he had been a "confidential correspondent" of Conway about Washington.

Gates replied to Washington on January 23, stating that he had not deputed Wilkinson to communicate the contents of Conway's letter to Washington, that he himself had written Conway only once, and that, although Conway's letter had not contained the statement quoted by Washington,<sup>8</sup> it ought not to be shown to "even those, who stand most high in the public esteem," because officers might be offended if their "faults, which inexperience, and that alone, may have led them into," were publicized. (Sparks, *Writings of Washington*, V, 500-501.)

This last statement must have been particularly galling to Washington, implying as it did that if a copy of the letter were furnished him, he could not be trusted to deal with it discreetly.<sup>9</sup> Washington came back (February 9, 1778) with a fifteen-hundred-word blast in which he sug-

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<sup>8</sup> Washington's aide, Fitzgerald, wrote that President Laurens had said that, while Conway's letter did not say what Wilkinson had reported, "in substance it contained that and ten times more." (Fitzgerald to Washington, February 16, 1778; Sparks, *Writings of Washington*, V, 511.) If the letter was in fact so bad, it is curious that the only extract from it copied by Laurens (the one quoted earlier in this chapter) should have been relatively innocuous.

<sup>9</sup> Washington proved that Gates had not been so far astray in distrusting his discretion, for he later had the poor taste to show Gates' letters to Wilkinson who, according to Washington, "was not at all sparing in his abuse" of Gates after seeing them. (Washington to Stirling, March 21, 1778.) This chumminess elated Wilkinson, who wrote Washington on March 28, 1778: "I beg you to receive the grateful homage of a sensible mind, for your condescension in exposing to me General Gates's letters, which unmask his artifices and efforts to ruin me." (Sparks, *Writings of Washington*, V, 516.) In his letter of January 23, Gates had written Washington that Wilkinson had endeavored to fix his suspicion on Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Troup by telling Gates that Troup "might have incautiously conversed on the substance of General Conway's letter with Colonel Hamilton." (Sparks, *Writings of Washington*, V, 501.)



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gested that the question of what Conway had said be summarily disposed of by furnishing him a copy of the letter,<sup>10</sup> and made further sarcastic remarks about Conway. He "lamented" that the "unseasonable diffidence" of that "adept in Military science" had deprived the nation of "those rich treasures of knowledge and experience he has since so freely laid open to you," and concluded by describing Conway as

"capable of all the malignity of detraction, and all the meanesses of intrigue, to gratify the absurd resentment of disappointed vanity, or to answer the purposes of personal aggrandizement, and promote the interests of faction."

Gates had the tardy good sense to offer to bring the battle of ink to a close by writing Washington on February 19:

"Yesterday I had the honor to receive your Excellency's letter of the 9th instant, and earnestly hope no more of that time, so precious to the public, may be lost upon the subject of General Conway's letter. Whether that gentleman does or does not deserve the suspicions you express, would be entirely indifferent to me, did he not possess an office of high rank in the army of the United States; for that reason solely I wish he may answer all the expectations of Congress. As to the gentleman, I have no personal connexion with him, nor had I any correspondence, previous to his writing the letter which has given offence; nor have I since written to him, save to certify what I know to be the contents of the letter. He therefore must be responsible; as I heartily dislike controversy, even upon my own account, and much more in a matter wherein I was only accidentally concerned. In regard to the parts of your Excel-

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<sup>10</sup> As brought out earlier in the chapter Gates no longer had the letter, having returned it to Conway.

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lency's letter addressed particularly to me, I solemnly declare that I am of no faction; and if any of my letters taken aggregately or by paragraphs convey any meaning, which in any construction is offensive to your Excellency, that was by no means the intention of the writer. After this, I cannot believe your Excellency will either suffer your suspicions or the prejudices of others to induce you to spend another moment upon this subject. With great respect, I am, Sir, &c." (Sparks, *Writings of Washington*, V, 511-12.)

Washington made a gracious reply on February 24, but he had apparently not buried the hatchet, for on February 28, 1778, he wrote his aide, Fitzgerald, "G—s" (Gates) "has involved himself in his Letters to me, in the most absurd contradictions."<sup>11</sup> General Charles Lee, with characteristic extravagance of statement, wrote Gates on December 19, 1779: "I am confident as I am of my own existence, that it is the determin'd purpose of that . . . arrogant and vindictive knave W." (Washington) ". . . to ruin your fame and fortunes forever" (*Lee Papers*, III, 401). Even as late as January 5, 1785, Washington wrote sourly to General Knox that Gates had "contrived to edge himself into" being appointed as his, Washington's, co-delegate to a meeting of Virginia and Maryland representatives for the regulation of the navigation of the Potomac. (Ford, *Writings of Washington*, X, 431.)

Possibly Washington's continuing unfriendliness was the cause of Gates' leaving Virginia for New York, which he did in 1790. He bought a country place—Rose Hill Farm—

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<sup>11</sup> This statement is untrue. I have meticulously read these letters, and find in them no contradictions, "absurd" or otherwise. The letters are collected in Appendix VI of volume 5 of Sparks, *Writings of Washington*.

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near the present corner of Twenty-third Street and Fourth Avenue, New York City, served a term in the New York Legislature, became a prominent Jeffersonian, and died in 1806; deeply mourned, if we can believe the newspapers of the day, by a host of friends.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE CONWAY CABAL

"Washington was the Revolution. The wise and learned of every land agree on this. . . . Yet intrigue and calumny sought his ruin. From Burgoyne's surrender on through the darkest days of Valley Forge, the Conway cabal shot its filaments through Congress, society, and even fastened upon the army itself. Gates was its figurehead, Conway its brain, Wilkinson its tool, Rush its amanuensis, and certain members of Congress its accessories before the fact." (Beveridge, *John Marshall*, 1916, I, 121.)

THE historians of the Revolution are pretty generally agreed that, in the winter of 1777-78, there was a dastardly plot, known as the Conway Cabal, to oust Washington from his command in favor of General Gates. But, while Generals Conway, Gates, and Mifflin, Dr. Benjamin Rush, physician-general of the middle department of the army, John and Samuel Adams, James Lovell of Massachusetts, and Richard Henry Lee are frequently mentioned as among the conspirators, there has been a great diversity of opinion concerning who were actually involved and how the members of the Cabal expected to accomplish their purpose.

According to the recent and detailed version of the affair, in Chapter 48 of Fitzpatrick's *George Washington Himself*, the Massachusetts members of Congress were hostile to Washington for various reasons, but especially be-

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cause they had been deprived by his appointment of "control of the army and of its supply departments." Having mustered enough power in Congress to displace the first victim of their malice, General Schuyler, by General Gates, they now planned to eliminate Washington too. Led by John Adams, who was dominated by "the inferiority complex of a small nature," and with the help of the other New England congressmen and Congressmen Richard Henry Lee and Francis Lightfoot Lee of Virginia, the Massachusetts delegation proposed to use "Gates, his Saratoga victory and his overweening ambition, in an herculean effort to drag Washington down." But their scheme was foiled by Washington's neat exposure of Conway's indiscreet letter to Gates, and once the affair was thus "dragged out into the light for all men to see," the Massachusetts plan to gain control of the army "went into the discard."<sup>1</sup>

In my opinion the Conway Cabal is probably a myth. We have seen that the replacement of Schuyler by Gates was born not of Congressional intrigue but of the well-founded hope of saving the broken northern army by removing from command a man in whom the New England soldiers had no confidence in favor of one whom they trusted; that Conway was appointed inspector, with the rank of major-general, and Gates, president of the Board of War, for reasons of sound policy; and that Conway, although he was censurable for becoming sarcastic to the point of insubordination, was apparently not concerned in any plot against Washington.

As may be seen in the letters cited and quoted in the Appendix to this chapter, many of the informed American

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<sup>1</sup> The Appendix to this chapter contains a guide to other references to the Cabal.

leaders in and out of Congress had reached the conclusion by the end of 1777 that Washington's army was deplorably lacking in training and discipline, that Washington himself had made serious mistakes, and that the tendency of his aides-de-camp and others to treat any criticism of him as *lèse majesté* must be discouraged. But I have found no evidence that any of the members of Congress, except possibly Lovell, thought it would be expedient to replace him, much less plotted to do so.

The view that there was an anti-Washington plot in Congress is based primarily on the correspondence of Henry Laurens, president of Congress, with his son John and with Washington. On October 16, 1777, he wrote John:

"... I am writing in Congress and in the midst of much talk (not regular Congress) buz! says one

"I would if I had been Comm<sup>r</sup> of that Army with such powers have procured all the necessaries which are said to be wanted without such whining Complaints.'

"I would says 2d. have prevented the amazing desertions which have happened it only wants proper attentions at fountain head' 3d. It is very easy too to prevent intercourses between the Army and the Enemy and as easy to gain Intelligence but we never mind who comes in and who goes out of our Camp.'

"In short 4th. our Army is under no regulations nor discipline' etc etc etc."

On January 10, 1778, he again wrote John:

"I am just returned from a large Company where I heard a discussion, I should say such a discussion on the necessity of appointing a Quarter Master General and the recommendation of

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your friend" (Washington) "and his opinion treated with so much indecent freedom and Levity, as affected me exceedingly and convinced me that your suspicions of a baneful influence are not ill founded. it would give me too much pain to repeat the Comparison drawn or rather the parallel between de Arendt" (the man suggested by Washington) "and Hay. let us have a little more patience we shall discover if there is a system to overturn or rule—for aught I know, to throw into confusion and bring in the ancient Rule."

And, on January 27, 1778, he wrote Washington:

"While I was sitting in Congress yesterday a Member came in and delivered me the inclosed paper <sup>2</sup> just in its present State except the broken Seals. the Gentleman's declaration as he was putting the thing into my hand, that he had picked it up on the Stairs, was a sufficient alarm. I passed my Eye cursorily over the pages, put them into my pocket and intimated to the House that it was an anonymous production containing stuff which I must be content with, as perquisites of Office, that the hearth was the proper depository for such Records."

But the fact, indicated by these letters, that there was a critical and questioning tone in Congress concerning Washington, at a time when the general public idolized him, does not necessarily imply that the critics were in favor of appointing a new commander-in-chief. In the first place, it must be recalled that Congress was familiar with the facts concerning Washington's mistakes and failures, while the general public was not. For example, Washington, in writing Governor Trumbull of Connecticut, on October 8,

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<sup>2</sup> The "paper," undated and in an unknown handwriting, is reminiscent of the letter of Rush to Governor Henry quoted later in this chapter. The paper is published in Sparks, *Writings of Washington*, V, 497.

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1777, concerning the battle of Germantown, gave the impression that it was a victory, saying:

"Our loss will amount, in killed and wounded, to upwards of three hundred. What that of the Enemy is we do not exactly know; but one deserter tells us, that, when he came away, the Returns amounted to upwards of 700, among which are Genl. Agnew killed, and Sr. Willm. Erskine badly wounded. Other Accounts say, that upwards of 200 Waggon's went into Philadelphia, loaded with wounded; if this is true their loss is more than the deserter mentions. Upon the whole, our Men are in high Spirits, and much pleased with the fortune of the day, tho' not so compleatly lucky as could have been wished."

Whereas in truth he and his troops had suffered a humiliating defeat in which they lost over a thousand in killed, wounded, and prisoners against a British loss of only about half that number.

Congress, of course, and perhaps Trumbull, too, ultimately learned the facts, but the public was not disillusioned. For, as illustrated by the following letter of February 18, 1781, from Alexander Hamilton to General Schuyler, giving his reasons for resigning as one of Washington's aides, the American leaders saw the necessity of maintaining Washington's popularity:

"It was not long before I discovered he was neither remarkable for delicacy nor good temper, . . . I was convinced the concessions the General might make" (to induce Hamilton to resume his office) "would be dictated by his interest, and that his self-love would never forgive me for what it would regard as a humiliation. . . . At the end of the war I may say many things to you concerning which I shall impose upon myself till then an inviolable silence." (Lodge, *Works of Alexander Hamilton*, VIII, 37-38.)



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In the second place, Congress was disturbed over the attitude of some of the officers close to Washington. The recent uproar in Washington's inner circle over Conway's promotion, discussed in the previous chapter, is an illustration. Others are the remark of General James Varnum of Rhode Island in a letter of February 1, 1778, to General Greene that:

"I revere General Washington, and nothing fills me with so much indignation as the villainy of some who dare speak disrespectfully of him." (*Magazine of American History*, XVIII, 188-89.)

and the following letter of January 10, 1778, to Greene from his aide-de-camp, Major John Clark:

"Various reports have been circulated thro this Country to prejudice the People against His Excellency & you. You are said to lead him into every measure, & that he had wrote if he fell, to have you appointed to the command of the Army. . . . I think a duel or two will soon put a period to those injurious reports, indeed I have cautioned some against them, assuring 'em the Gent. of the Army (*friends to the Gen'l*) would not hear them abused without calling the persons to account in a public manner. Therefore I believe they will sing small, indeed I believe a few Ozs. of Gun-powder diffused thro proper channels will answer a good purpose." (Nathanael Greene Papers, William L. Clements Library.)

Congressman Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts clearly pointed out why Congress must oppose any such attitude. In a letter of February 7, 1778, to General Knox, repudiating the latter's suggestion that there was a movement in Congress against Washington, Gerry said:

## THE CONWAY CABAL

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"How then can we account for such groundless rumours at a time when the character of this worthy officer is high in congress, and when there appears to be an intention of the members to support him, but by considering them as the effect of a party spirit, that is dangerous to the cause in which we are engaged? . . . The disputes relative to rank have probably had some share in exciting this spirit; but here I must condemn some of the officers, in opposing a constitutional exercise of the authority of congress . . . what has been the consequence of every appointment of general officers made by congress? If it did not suit the whole army, opposition has taken place, and reduced congress to the necessity of asserting the rights of themselves and their constituents, or consenting to give them up in a manner that would sap the foundation of liberty."

A third point to be remembered is that since Congress was the chief executive, as well as the chief legislative body, the consideration and discussion of Washington, his defeats and supposed mistakes, were a congressman's duty. Even if a bloc of them had favored Washington's removal, this would not have been a cabal in any ordinary sense of the word, for if a congressman believed it to be for the best interests of the United States that Washington be removed, he would have been subject to censure for failing to act, not for acting, on his conviction. But the fact is that all the members of Congress, with the possible exception of Lovell, appear to have fully appreciated that Washington had qualities of leadership and a symbolic value which made it imperative that he be retained in the chief command as long as he was willing to carry the burden.

Laurens himself wrote Lafayette on January 12, 1778:

"I think the friends of our brave and virtuous General, may rest assured that he is out of the reach of his Enemies, if he has

## CHAPTER VII

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an Enemy, a fact of which I am in doubt of. I believe I hear most that is said and know the outlines of almost all that has been attempted, but the whole amounts to little more than tittle tattle, which would be too much honoured by repeating it."

And other congressmen were even more emphatic in their avowals that the suspicions of an anti-Washington movement in Congress were not well founded. The remarks of Gerry on the point have just been quoted, and they are confirmed by Congressman Eliphalet Dyer of Connecticut, who, on March 10, 1778, wrote his friend William Williams:

"be assured there is not the most distant thought of removing Genll. Washington, nor ever an expression in Congress looking that way. . . ." <sup>3</sup>

That these statements were more than fine words is proved by the action of Congress on a vitally important question concerning Washington's powers which arose at the very time when the plot was supposed to be thickest. On September 17, October 8, and December 10, 1777, Congress temporarily conferred on Washington wide powers, including the right "to suspend all officers who shall misbehave, and to fill up all vacancies in the American army, under the rank of brigadiers." The question arose whether the existence of these extraordinary powers should be ex-

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<sup>3</sup> Washington's aide, Fitzgerald, wrote Washington (March 17, 1778) that Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the well-known congressman from Maryland, had said much this same thing. (Gratz Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.) To the same effect, Washington to Landon Carter, May 30, 1778; and Lund Washington, quoting George Mason, to Washington, February 18, 1778. (Toner Transcripts, Papers of George Washington, Vol. 730, pp. 295-98, Library of Congress.)

tended, and on December 30, 1777, Congress, apparently with no dissent, voted to extend them.<sup>4</sup>

Until recently there was possible justification for a suspicion that Congressman Richard Henry Lee, frequently named as a ringleader in the Cabal, was secretly attempting to undermine Washington. But recent research, described in the Appendix to this chapter, shows that there is no ground for suspecting even Lee.

The principal ground for the view that the supposed Cabal existed in the *army* is a letter of March 28, 1778, from Washington to Governor Patrick Henry of Virginia, in which he said:

"The Anonymous <sup>5</sup> Letter" (dated January 12, 1778) "with which you were pleased to favour me, was written by Doctor Rush, so far as I can judge from a similitude of hands. This Man has been elaborate, and studied in his professions of regard for me; and long since the Letter to you.

"My caution to avoid any thing, that could injure the service, prevented me from communicating, but to very few of my friends, the intrigues of a faction, which I know was formed

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<sup>4</sup> The original determination of Congress in no case to record the votes of its members had been abandoned, and the journals of Congress for the year 1777 record a sharp division of opinion on many important questions.

<sup>5</sup> "Unsigned" is a more accurate description, because the writer—Benjamin Rush—not only made no effort to disguise his well-known handwriting (he was one of the most copious writers of his day), but stated that the author of the letter "is one of your Philadelphia friends," and that, if Henry recognized the handwriting, he was not to mention the author's name in disclosing the contents of the letter to others. (Rush's letter is in Sparks, *Writings of Washington*, V, 495-96.) It was apparently one of Rush's idiosyncrasies to send letters unsigned. (See General Charles Lee's letter to him of August 13, 1778, chaffing him for sending a "letter of no date, and sign'd with no name." *Lee Papers*, III, 228.)

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against me, since it might serve to publish our internal dissensions; but their own restless Zeal to advance their views has too clearly betrayed them, and made concealment, on my part, fruitless. I cannot precisely mark the extent of their views, but it appeared in general, that General Gates was to be exalted, on the ruin of my reputation and influence. This I am authorised to say, from undeniable facts in my own possession, from publications, the evident scope of which, could not be mistaken, and from private detractions industriously circulated. General Mifflin, it is commonly supposed, bore the second part in the Cabal; and General Conway, I know was a very Active and malignant Partisan.”<sup>6</sup>

This letter was written, however, at a time when Washington was extremely on edge over his recent defeats by Howe and the criticism that had followed. An earlier episode indicates that, under such circumstances, he was likely to develop unjustified suspicions. In the summer of 1757, when criticisms of Washington's handling of the Virginia troops on the Virginia frontier were in circulation, his friend Captain William Peachy wrote him that Charles Carter had said that Christopher Robinson had said that he had heard Richard Corbin say that the reports of Indian raids which had been sent by Washington to Governor Dinwiddie were cock and bull stories concocted to get larger appropriations for the army.<sup>7</sup> (Washington to Dinwiddie, September 17, 1757.) Without the slightest hesita-

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<sup>6</sup> Some writers have interpreted Washington's reference in this letter to Gates as naming him one of the members of the Cabal. But the context tends to indicate that Rush rather than Gates was referred to as the one to whom Mifflin “bore the second part.” There is a similar ambiguity in a letter from Washington to Landon Carter of May 30, 1778.

<sup>7</sup> Because he had differences of opinion with Washington, Dinwiddie has been dealt with harshly by the historians, as illustrated by Trevelyan's assertion that: “The Governor of Virginia grudged him” (Wash-

tion, Washington not only jumped to the conclusion that such slanderous remarks had in fact been made, but, in spite of the fact that Corbin was an old family acquaintance who had been conspicuous in his friendship for him, assumed that Corbin was guilty.<sup>8</sup>

The other supposed evidence against the military members of the supposed Cabal is unimpressive. There was gossip that General Mifflin was hostile to Washington, but Mifflin denied such hostility forcibly in a letter of February 1, 1778, to Colonel Delany (William Rawle, "Sketch of the Life of Thomas Mifflin," in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, *Memoirs*, Vol. II, Part II, 125), and there is no substantial evidence in support of the charge.<sup>9</sup> As to Gates, there is not the slightest evidence in his letters or elsewhere that he was hostile to Washington or concerned in any project to displace him.<sup>10</sup>

Conway, if Lafayette's letter to Washington of December 30, 1777, quoted on page 54, is to be believed, was by that date apparently hostile to Washington. But, assum-

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ington) "rank and pay, and stinted him in men and means; lost no opportunity of reminding him that he was a provincial and not a royal officer; and made himself the centre of military intrigues which gave Washington a foretaste of what he was to endure at the hands of Charles Lee, and Gates, and Benedict Arnold, in the darkest hours of his country's history." (*The American Revolution*, I, 54.) But a reading of Dinwiddie's correspondence in Brock's *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie* indicates that he was an exceptionally fair-minded, able, and honest official.

<sup>8</sup> Washington's correspondence in the affair is given in the Appendix to this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> My conclusions on this and other points relating to the Conway Cabal are fortified by an exceptionally well written and documented doctoral dissertation, *Thomas Mifflin, the Revolutionary Patriot from Pennsylvania*, by Kenneth Rossman, 1940. The dissertation is filed in the Library of the University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.

<sup>10</sup> A detailed discussion of the grounds for this statement is contained in the Appendix to this chapter.

ing that such was the case, this is far from establishing that he participated in a movement to displace the Commander-in-Chief, and his surviving letters, while barbed with sarcasm, contain no evidence of such participation. On the contrary, their very outspokenness tends to belie the supposition that Conway was engaged in a conspiracy against the man whom he talked back to with such abandon.

A number of historians believe that the sending of Lafayette and Conway as fellow officers on the abortive Canadian expedition of February 1778 was part of the conspirators' scheme against Washington. But, for reasons set forth in the next chapter, there is no substantial justification for this suspicion.

The only substantial evidence is against Rush—who wrote, in the "Anonymous" letter referred to in Washington's letter to Henry:

"America can only be undone by herself. . . . Her army, what is it? A major-general belonging to it called it a few days ago, in my hearing, a mob. Discipline unknown or wholly neglected. . . . We have wisdom, virtue, and strength enough to save us, if they could be called into action. The northern army has shown us what Americans are capable of doing, with a General at their head. The spirit of the southern army is no way inferior to the spirit of the northern. A Gates, a Lee, or a Conway, would in a few weeks render them an irresistible body of men." (Sparks, *Writings of Washington*, V. 496.)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> On October 21, 1777, Rush had written John Adams, apropos of Gates' victory over Burgoyne: "I am more convinced than ever of the necessity of discipline and system in the management of our affairs. I have heard several officers who have served under General Gates compare his army to a well regulated family. The same gentlemen have compared Gen'l Washington's imitation of an army to an unformed mob." (Paul Leicester Ford, "Dr. Rush and General Washington," *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 75, p. 637, 1895.)

This letter implies that Rush would welcome a movement to replace Washington by one of the generals named. But it takes more than one to form a conspiracy, and I find no evidence that Rush had any confederates.

Channing, while assuming the existence of the Cabal, passes lightly over the matter with a brief intimation that it is shrouded in impenetrable mists. (Channing, *History of the United States*, III, 290.) Perhaps this is the last word that can be said on the subject with any assurance. But if so, the historian, like the judge in a court of common law, ought to instruct his jury of readers that the accused cannot be held guilty of the offence charged against him.



## CHAPTER VIII

### CONWAY AND LAFAYETTE

"But, in spite of M. de La Fayette's resolution to stand by the Commander-in-Chief during this crisis in his affairs, the conspirators, who were still fomenting hostility and stubbornly developing their intrigue, decided upon removing him from the head-quarters, in order to deprive General Washington of the moral weight of his presence,—with the hope, possibly, that, by flattering attentions to him, they might ultimately win him over to their side." (Charlemagne Tower, *The Marquis de La Fayette in the American Revolution*, 1895, I, 267-68.)

FOLLOWING Burgoyne's surrender, the British abandoned Fort Ticonderoga on November 8, 1777. But their armed ships continued to command Lake Champlain until the lake froze. On December 3, 1777, Congress appointed Brigadier-General John Stark of New Hampshire to lead a projected raid across the ice to destroy the British vessels near the outlet of Lake Champlain in Canada, and sent Congressman James Duane of New York to Albany to collaborate with him. The raid failed to materialize.<sup>1</sup> But when Gates arrived at the Board of War on January 19, 1778, he revised and expanded the project into a proposed

<sup>1</sup> The possible explanation for this is that Duane was halted by the critical illness of his wife, Mary Livingston Duane, at Livingston Manor, where he was still detained as late as December 23, 1777. (Duane to Governor Clinton; *Public Papers of George Clinton*, II, 597.)

expedition into Canada as far as Montreal, with Lafayette in command and Conway as second in command.

Lafayette, a romantic, young Catholic officer from France, was obviously the ideal person to arouse the enthusiasm for the American cause in Canada. Canada had been wrested by Great Britain from France less than twenty years before, and over nine-tenths of its white residents were Catholics of French blood. There was also good reason for selecting Conway to accompany him. Conway too was a French officer. Furthermore his controversy with Washington barred him from the main army; and yet, with the crucial French Alliance supposedly hanging in the balance, Congress did not dare let him go back to France disgruntled. The Alliance was signed on February 6, 1778, but word of it did not reach Congress until May.

Congress adopted the recommendations of the Board of War concerning the proposed Canadian expedition, on January 22 and 23, 1778. On January 24, Gates, as president of the Board, wrote Washington:

"By the enclosed Papers your Excellency will see the Designs of Congress in forming the Plan of an Irruption into Canada. Their political Motives for appointing the Officers to conduct the Expedition need not be mentioned, as your Excellency must be struck with the Propriety of the Measure. The Board have carefully avoided weakning the Army under your immediate Command, as they well know the Situation of it; but if you could spare Hazen's Regiment or even that Part of it, which is composed of Canadians their Services would be exceedingly acceptable . . . Should your Excellency think any Steps are wanting or any Directions omitted, which may be necessary upon this important Enterprize, the Board will be happy on this, as well as every other Occasion, to recieve your

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Opinion & Advice. The Letter to the Marquis de Fayette is enclosed for your Perusal & I am to request your Delivery of it with your Permission to him to leave his present Command in the Grand Army." (Gates Papers, The New York Historical Society.)

Washington replied on January 27, 1778, that he had no suggestions, that he was ordering Hazen's regiment to Albany, and that he had delivered the Board's letter to Lafayette, who would set out for York the next day.

The letter to Lafayette, also dated January 24, stated that he had been appointed to the Command of an Expedition meditated against Montreal; that it was important for him to set out immediately; that he was authorized to take with him Colonel Fleury and such other French officers as he thought would be serviceable; and that General Conway would hand him the instructions for the expedition. (Gates Papers, The New York Historical Society.) <sup>2</sup>

The story of Lafayette and the Canadian expedition as told by Tower and other historians is that the conspirators in the Conway Cabal sought to win the support of Lafayette in the hope that the French cabinet would negotiate the desired French-American alliance through them and that they would thus gain popular credit for the Alliance. To this end they induced the Board of War and Congress to simulate an expedition against Canada, appoint Lafayette commander-in-chief, and place Conway beside him as second in command. With Lafayette removed from the personal influences of Washington and exposed to "the insidious atmosphere of Conway's flatteries," he might be drawn

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<sup>2</sup> The Instructions are quoted in part in the Appendix to this chapter.

into the conspiracy.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, even if this larger purpose failed, the machinations of the Cabal would be furthered by depriving Washington of the benefit of Lafayette's presence.

Warned, however, by Congress' "insult" to Washington in not having consulted the Commander-in-Chief about the expedition and in having offered Lafayette an "independent" command, the latter took "the path of right as he saw it and knew it, without regard to self." Instead of falling "a victim to the cunning of intrigue," he spurned the "tempting offers which were cunningly prepared to seduce him," and by boldly challenging the conspirators "in General Gates's own house" "defeated the plot."

This story is supported by assertions made by Lafayette in letters and his *Memoirs*. But he adduces no evidence in support of the suspicions which he expresses, and, for reasons about to be stated, they cannot be given credence.

To begin with, it is incredible that the supposed conspirators could have believed they might win Lafayette by sending him off on what would soon be exposed as a wild-goose chase. Lafayette's most obvious characteristic was his desire for glory—a trait which he himself emphasized again and again—and anyone with the slightest perception must have realized that the surest way to incur his enmity would be to despatch him on an errand that must end as a fiasco. Furthermore, why should the supposed conspirators have gone to such elaborate trouble to accomplish the relatively simple object of temporarily detaching Lafayette from Washington and bringing him under Conway's influence?

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<sup>8</sup> The quotations in this and the next paragraph are from Tower, I, 268-87, quoted at length in the Appendix to this chapter. A characteristic excerpt from Trevelyan's similar but even more sensational account is also given in the Appendix.

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Why not, for example, send Lafayette and Conway as ambassadors to the Mohawk or the Ohio to persuade some of the Indian chiefs, friendly to France in the old days, that France was now the friend of the United States? Such a project, besides being simpler, would have had a foreseeable chance of being successful and hence of winning Lafayette to the side of those contributing to his success.

In the second place, the argument that the expedition was a plot is based on premises which are untenable. The argument is that the expedition was so clearly ordained to fail that Congress must have had some ulterior motive in authorizing it and that this ulterior motive was to detach Lafayette from Washington. But this argument is unsound on two counts. The expedition was not plainly predestined to fail even in its immediate objective. Lafayette himself wrote Gates on February 23, 1778: "What hurts me more is to think that we want only time, and was I in the month of January I would be certain of carrying the business." (Gates Papers, The New York Historical Society.) Furthermore, even if the project was undertaken primarily or solely for some reason other than the avowed one, there is no reason to assume that the object was to strengthen the supposed conspiracy against Washington. On the contrary there is reason to believe that the ulterior object was to relieve pressure on Washington's army by inducing the British to send reinforcements to Canada.

This appears from a letter of February 6, 1778, from Congressman John Penn of Virginia to Theodorick Bland of Virginia, stating that one of the purposes of the expedition was to "distress the Ministry in their Councils, they will be

at a loss where to send reinforcements if they have any." This same purpose is referred to in the following letter of February 17, 1778, from Congressman Dyer to William Williams, stating that Gates had said:

"the report of our forming a descent on Canada again would reach the Court in Great Britain and must perplex their counsels in carrying on the war for the ensuing year and would divide their forces as they would undoubtedly send a considerable part to Canada."

and that his fellow congressmen and he thought the expedition would have this favorable effect even if it did not succeed in its immediate military objective.

Finally, how could the supposed conspirators have prevailed upon the Board of War and Congress to approve the project if it were a mere plot to ruin Washington? For a majority of the Board and of the Congressmen serving at this time were, as far as is known, unqualifiedly loyal to Washington.<sup>4</sup>

The view that the expedition was a sham, a mere device to win over Lafayette from Washington to Conway, is advanced in some of Lafayette's letters. But the following record of his writings and behaviour at this time shows that he was so obsessed by suspicion and egotism as to make his statements unimpressive.

Laurens<sup>5</sup> wrote privately to Lafayette of the Canadian

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<sup>4</sup> The membership of the Board and of Congress, at this time, is discussed in the Appendix to this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise indicated "Laurens" refers to President Laurens. In September 1777, Lafayette had journeyed in Laurens' coach from Bristol, Pennsylvania, to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and this traveling acquaintance, coupled with Lafayette's friendship for Laurens' son John, an aide of Washington, laid the basis for an exchange of correspondence.

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project and the appointment of him as its leader, on January 22 (Burnett, *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, III, 47), two days before the Board's announcement was sent to him. Unfortunately, by the time the Board's letter reached him on January 27, he had convinced himself that Conway, who was in York, was up to some mischief. Indeed, the atmosphere of suspiciousness pervading Washington's headquarters seems to have brought Lafayette into a state bordering on hysteria. He warned Laurens in an undated letter written about this time, "you are surrounded by secret enemys, you have thousand among you, some perhaps in Congress itself" (*South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*,<sup>6</sup> VII, 64), and, on arriving at Albany some weeks later, he promptly discovered a "plot carried on to burn the city of albany, the stores, magazines . . . many officers and gentlemen were to be assassinated by their own nigroes &c &c &c" (Lafayette to Laurens, March 11, 1778; *South Carolina*, VIII, 6-7).

Lafayette replied to Laurens' letter of January 22 by an undated letter reading as follows:

"You will be surprised to hear that I have not received any intelligence about that Appointment from any member of Congress or of the board war but from the president of Congress—perhaps a man who is not unknown to you has contrived some base scheme to stop the expedition of it—I am told by the baron de Kalb who has received a letter from a gentleman in york-town, that the same man is appointed to be under me in the command." (*South Carolina*, VII, 126.)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This magazine will hereafter in this chapter be referred to as "*South Carolina*."

<sup>7</sup> Lafayette added that de Kalb was very angry at Conway because Conway had said he and all the other French officers were dissatisfied

But the Board's letter of the 24th, as we have seen, fully confirmed Laurens' letter of the 22nd, and on the 28th, Lafayette set out for York, where he arrived on the 30th.

In appointing Conway second in command, Congress had failed to take into account Lafayette's hostility to him. Laurens knew of it from the following undated letter from Lafayette which he had received on January 5, 1778:

"what has he" (Gates) "done in all to compare him to that hero who at the head of sixteen hundred peasants pursued<sup>8</sup> last winter a strong disciplined army through an open and vast country—to that great general who is born for the salvation of his country and the admiration of the universe . . . and now a major general, inspector general, a kind of superintendent of all the army with about the same rights as du coudray could ever desire in the artillerie is sent to him without his participation—he is not acquainted of a word of it till grl connway appears himself—indeed he does not deserve that neglect, I say more that kind of insult—if you could know in what circumstance it happens—what letter had been wrote by the same gentleman—but if general washington has been moderate enough as to keep the silence about this matter I schall imitate him." (*South Carolina*, VII, 65-66.)

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with the American service. Conway may well have heard de Kalb thus express himself, for on December 25, 1777, de Kalb wrote to his patron, the Duc de Broglie, in France: "All my remonstrances against this abuse" (haphazard arrangement of quarters) "were of no avail. I have abandoned the practice of suggesting improvements in the service and in organization. . . . How sad, that troops of such excellence, and so much zeal, should be so little spared and so badly led! But everything here combines to inspire disgust. At the smallest sign from you I shall return home." (Kapp, *Kalb*, pp. 141-42.)

<sup>8</sup> Lafayette was confused at this point. The "sixteen hundred peasants," comprising Washington's army in the winter of 1776-77, were the pursued, not the pursuer, through the "open and vast country" to which Lafayette refers.



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But the members of Congress generally probably did not know of Lafayette's attitude, since he seems at all times to have kept on superficially good terms with Conway.<sup>8a</sup>

An undated letter from Lafayette to Laurens received by the latter on January 28, 1776, indicates that Lafayette first intended to reject the command because of Conway's connection with the expedition (*South Carolina*, VII, 182). But he later determined to go to York and force Congress to give him the command on his own terms, as appears from the following letter of January 31, 1778, to Laurens, written by Lafayette the day after he arrived in York:

"if my going there" (to Canada on his own terms) "is not agreed upon immediately I'll resign this evening and the other french generals and officers will send theyr resignations in two days. . . .

"if no french officers as it will be go to canada then no canadians will join under that irish man principally when they will see us going of and publishing the reasons which dissify gnl washington myself and all the french officers, to whom congress has been so ungrateful." (*South Carolina*, VII, 183.)

"At half past nine" of the same day, he wrote Laurens of the developments at a meeting of the Board of War which he had just attended:

"I am Coming from that board—I spoke to them with a great frankness and finished by telling that if they do'nt give me mg dougall or Kalb, and the french officers appointed according to my ideas I decline the appointement and will go to france with most all the french officers in the army—I am sorry my dear sir, to think that two or three rascals oblige me to make

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<sup>8a</sup> Possible factors in the development of Lafayette's hostility to Conway are discussed in the Appendix to this chapter.

out such a conditions and take such steps—Mr. Lee<sup>9</sup> was I believe for me, duer quite against, the secretary” (Mr. Peters) “charmed with that dispute, and the old fellow” (Gates) “scratching his wigg—I think they’l beg Congress to meet to-morrow tho’ it is Sunday. . . .

“if you are not so good as to make out before Congress will meet a little cabale in my favour, then I’l be lost and as I ca’n’t go back obliged to keep my word in going home.” (*South Carolina*, VII, 183-84.)

Congress, with the French Alliance supposedly hanging in the balance, could not risk a wholesale resignation of the French officers, and compromised by appointing McDougall, or, in the alternative, de Kalb as second in command, with Conway in third place. Lafayette acquiesced in this arrangement, and left York the next day for Valley Forge, where he arrived on February 7. En route he wrote Laurens, jeering at Conway as “inspector gnl of the army without inspection, and second commander of the incursion without any particular command,” and warning Laurens not to “forget to put in the fire the little note I had given yesterday for remembrance in Congress” (*South Carolina*, VII, 185). On February 8, Lafayette was off for Albany, where he arrived on February 17. De Kalb came later. Conway, who preceded them, reported to Lafayette on his arrival that “the expedition is quite impossible” because of deficiencies in men and supplies, and Lafayette, after investigation, concurred. (Lafayette to Washington, February 19, 1778; *Memoirs*, I, 154-58.)

The failure of the expedition to materialize was humili-

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<sup>9</sup> The words are printed “tho he,” but these do not make sense, and the letter in fact reads “Mr. Lee.” Francis Lightfoot Lee was a member of the old Board of War.

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ating to Lafayette, especially so because he had exaggerated the importance of the command. In writing his wife on February 3, 1778, he said:

"I am to repair thither" (to Canada) "with the title of General of the Northern Army, at the head of three thousand men, to see if no evil can be done to the English in that country. The idea of rendering the whole of New France free, and of delivering her from a heavy yoke, is too glorious for me to allow myself to dwell upon it. My army would, in that case, increase at an immense rate, and would be increased also by the French." (*Memoirs*, I, 151.)<sup>10</sup>

And on February 19 he wrote Laurens that, because of the letters he had written to Europe about the expedition, "the whole world has their eyes fixed upon me." (*South Carolina*, VII, 190.)

Conway was, of course, to blame, according to Lafayette. In writing Washington from Albany on February 19, he said darkly that he had found Conway "looking as if he had good intentions; but we know a great deal upon that subject" (*Memoirs*, I, 155), and, on the same day, he wrote Laurens:

"there is in that ridiculous and shocking affair" (the Canadian expedition) "a piece of folly or a piece of villainy beyond all expressions. . . . I'll publish the whole history, I'll publish my instructions *with notes* through the world, and I'll loose rather the honor of twenty gattess and twenty boards of war, than to let my own reputation be hurted in the least thing. . . . you know that the whole expedition has been put on foot in order

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<sup>10</sup> This letter was, of course, written in French. But the English translations in the American edition of Lafayette's *Memoirs* are consistently accurate. The French original of this letter is in Lafayette's *Mémoires, Correspondence et Manuscrits*, I, 151-53.

to satisfy one single man's ambition. the behaviour and *underhands* of this man here I cannot conceive, neither understand yet." (*South Carolina*, VII, 190-92.)

His sense of grievance was intensified when he jumped to the unwarranted conclusion, on reading one of Gates' letters, that he was about to be recalled to give Conway permanent command of the troops assembled for the expedition. He wrote Laurens on March 12:

"if I am recalled to leave this command in the hands of a gentleman who comes from europe as well as myself, who is not above me neither by his birth neither by his relations or influence in the world, who has not had any more particular occasion of distinguishing himself than I have had, who has not the advantages I can glory myself in, of being born a french man, I will look upon myself as not only ill used but very near being affronted—and such will be the sentiment of all those of my nation and europe whose opinion is dear to me." (*South Carolina*, VIII, 10.)

He also repeated his former threat that if Congress failed to give way, he would not only return to France himself, but draw with him "many french officers more useful than myself," including "general de Kalb, g<sup>m</sup> portail and the engeneers" (pp. 10-11). The threat about the engineers was a serious one, because General du Portail and his staff of French engineering officers were of great value to the American army.

Fortunately, he was later mollified by the receipt of a laudatory resolution of Congress of March 2, accompanied by a letter of March 4, from Laurens, assuring him that "the approbation contained in that Act, is genuine, not merely complimentary." And, on Washington's request, he

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returned to Valley Forge where he arrived April 8, 1778.

The minor features of the story as told by Tower, Trevelyan and others are as lacking in credibility as the part relating to the supposed object of the expedition. The "shaming" of the conspirators "in General Gates' own house" can be briefly disposed of by pointing out that the only discoverable basis for supposing that it occurred, is the following passage in Lafayette's *Memoirs*, I, 39:

"At Gates' own house he" (Lafayette himself) "braved the whole party, and threw them into confusion by making them drink the health of their general."

It is, of course, impossible to prove that Lafayette was not at Gates' house and that "the whole party" (Lafayette does not say who composed it) was not thrown into confusion by his alleged toast. But this unsupported assertion, made years later, is not convincing.

As to the other minor point—the "insult" to Washington in having arranged for the expedition without consulting him and in giving Lafayette an "independent" command—the pertinent facts are as follows. The Canadian expedition, even if only a ruse to confuse the English, must, with the winter half gone, be set on foot immediately; the six or seven days that would be lost in communicating with Washington, after the expedition was determined upon, might easily spell the difference between success and failure. The Board of War and Congress therefore acted without consulting Washington. But, as we have seen, the Board paid Washington such courtesy as was practicable by promptly writing him about the expedition and sending him for perusal and delivery to Lafayette the letter notifying him of his appointment. Under these circumstances it is

unreasonable to believe that an insult to Washington was intended.<sup>11</sup>

The story that Congress sought to insult and undermine Washington by giving Lafayette a command independent of Washington may have resulted from the following letter, dated January 22, 1778, from Laurens to Lafayette:

"Just returned from Congress, where a Report was made from the Board of War making out a separate Command for Major Gen. Marquis delafayette."

Laurens spoke of the command, not as "independent," but as "separate"—which by its very nature it would have to be. The Journals of Congress, the instructions of the Board of War and the letter from the Board to Lafayette notifying him of his appointment, all indicate that no command independent of Washington's authority was intended.

But Lafayette's self-esteem at this time was such as to induce him to believe almost anything flattering to his vanity. His exaggeration of the importance of the Canadian expedition has been brought out earlier in this chapter. On December 16, 1777, he wrote his father-in-law, the Duc d'Ayen, that Washington's "tender friendship for me, and his complete confidence in me, relating to all military and political subjects, great as well as small, enable me to judge of all the interests he has to conciliate, and all the difficulties he has to conquer." (*Memoirs*, I, 131.) And, on January 6, 1778, he wrote his wife:

"General Washington would feel very unhappy if I were to speak of quitting him; his confidence in me is greater than

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<sup>11</sup> A puzzling letter from Laurens, speaking of Lafayette's "noble resentment for the affront offered" Washington, is discussed in the Appendix to this chapter.

## CHAPTER VIII

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I dare acknowledge, on account of my youth. In the place he occupies, he is liable to be surrounded by flatterers or secret enemies; he finds in me a secure friend, in whose bosom he may always confide his most secret thoughts, and who will always speak the truth. Not one day passes without his holding long conversations with me, writing me long letters, and he has the kindness to consult me on the most important matters." (*Memoirs*, I, 143.)

It is therefore not surprising to find that Lafayette thought he had been offered a command on a parity with that of Washington. He wrote Laurens an undated letter, which Laurens received on February 6, 1778, reading as follows:

"I was thinking of the title of that man" (Lafayette himself) "going to Canada—I am afraid some body will call him commander in chief in order to excuse himself—but I desire it would be called only general and commander of the northern army—I do'nt say I will so much, but I say positively I will no more, neither any expedition which could hurt the commander in chief's" (Washington's) "rights." (*South Carolina*, VII, 187)

Such youthful romancing is usually understood and ignored. Unfortunately, in this instance, the historians have long accepted it as the basis for charging Lafayette's colleagues with unworthy motives and actions of which they were apparently innocent.

## CHAPTER IX

### GATES AND THE FRENCH ALLIANCE

"The Saratoga victory far from being the deciding element," (in securing the French Alliance) "merely contributed to the convincing effect of Washington's indomitable purpose and honesty of character." (John C. Fitzpatrick, "George Washington" in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, 1936.)

THE biographical account of Washington from which the head-note is quoted was written by Dr. John Fitzpatrick, editor of the monumental Bicentennial Edition of the *Writings of Washington*. For years to come this account will probably be read more frequently than any other biography of Washington. In the part of the account dealing with the achievement of the crucial French Alliance, Fitzpatrick makes no mention whatsoever of Gates. Washington's contribution is described as follows:

"The Continental Army emerged from the suffering of Valley Forge better trained, as the result of months of steady drill under Baron von Steuben, and both the army and the country had been heartened by the news of the alliance with France, in March 1778. Here again Washington's value to the Revolution is manifest for, despite every effort of Congress and its commissioners in Paris and regardless of the French secret aid which had been given for nearly two years, France was not ready openly to assist the Americans until convinced that they



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would not compromise with Great Britain. The battles of Trenton, Brandywine, and Germantown went far toward convincing France, but the main assurance was the character and purpose of George Washington. Gerard, the French minister, who held long interviews with him, became convinced that Washington's attitude was uncompromising and that the army would, to a man, follow him. This confidence Gerard succeeded in instilling in Vergennes, the French minister of foreign affairs and so, in turn, influencing the French king. The Saratoga victory far from being the deciding element, merely contributed to the convincing effect of Washington's indomitable purpose and honesty of character."

This statement is utterly misleading. It is true that the efforts of the American commissioners to France, to persuade the French Court (which was furnishing secret financial aid) to form an alliance with or even recognize the independence of the United States had been in vain. The Court was apparently opposed to involving itself openly in the affair, as indicated by the following letter from the commissioners, Silas Deane, Benjamin Franklin, and Arthur Lee, to the Committee for Foreign Affairs of the Continental Congress, written on November 30, 1777: <sup>1</sup>

"They, however, we have reason to believe, will not begin the quarrel as long as they can avoid it, nor give us any open assistance of ships or troops. Indeed, we are scarce allowed to know that they give us any aids at all, but are left to imagine, if we please, that the cannon, arms, etc., which we have received and sent are the effects of private benevolence and generosity. We have, nevertheless, the strongest reasons to confide

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<sup>1</sup> This and all subsequent quotations in this chapter, not otherwise identified, are from Wharton, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the American Revolution*, Vol. II. The correspondence is published chronologically, so that the date of the letter is sufficient citation.

## GATES AND THE FRENCH ALLIANCE

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that the same generosity will continue; and it leaves America the glory of working out her deliverance by her own virtue and bravery, on which, with God's blessing, we advise you chiefly to depend."

But the reason for Louis XVI's change of heart was not Gérard's interviews with and convictions about Washington, but the news of Burgoyne's surrender. This news was brought to Paris on December 4, 1777, by Jonathan L. Austin, a Boston sea captain. The American commissioners promptly renewed their proposal for an alliance in the following letter of December 8, 1777, to the Count de Vergennes, French Minister of Foreign Affairs:

"Sir: The commissioners from the Congress of the United States of North America beg leave to represent to your excellency that it is near a year since they had the honor of putting into your hands the propositions of Congress for a treaty of amity and commerce with this kingdom, to which, with sundry other memorials, requesting the aid of ships of war and offering engagements to unite the forces of the said States with those of France and Spain in acting against the dominions of Great Britain, and to make no peace but in conjunction with those courts if Great Britain should declare war against them, to all which they have received no determinate answer; and apprehending that a continuance of this state of uncertainty with regard to those propositions, together with the reports that must soon be spread in America of rigorous treatment met with in the ports of these kingdoms may give advantage to our enemy in making ill impressions on the minds of our people, who from the secrecy enjoined on us can not be informed of the friendly and essential aids that have been so generously but privately afforded us, the commissioners conceive that, the present circumstances considered, the completing of such a

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treaty at this time must have the most happy effect in raising the credit of the United States abroad and strengthening their resolution at home, as well as discouraging and diminishing their internal enemies and confirming their friends who might otherwise waver."

The momentous events that followed are described in the commissioners' letter of December 18 to the Congressional Committee for Foreign Affairs:

"Gentlemen: Since our last, of November 30—a copy of which is herewith sent you—we received your dispatches of October 6, from Yorktown.<sup>2</sup> They came to us by a packet from Boston, which brought the great news of Burgoyne's defeat and surrender—news that apparently occasioned as much general joy in France as if it had been a victory of their own troops over their own enemies—such is the universal, warm, and sincere good-will and attachment to us and our cause in this nation.

"We took the opportunity of pressing the ministry by a short memorial to the conclusion of our proposed treaty, which had so long lain under their consideration and been from time to time postponed. A meeting was had accordingly on Friday, the 12th instant, in which some difficulties were mentioned and removed; some explanations asked and given to satisfaction. As the concurrence of Spain is necessary, we were told that a courier should be dispatched the next day to obtain it, which we are since assured was done; and in three weeks from the time the answer is expected.

". . . M. Gerard, one of the secretaries, came yesterday to inform us, by order of the king, that after long and full consideration of our affairs and propositions in council it was decided, and his majesty was determined, to acknowledge our independence, and make a treaty with us of amity and com-

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<sup>2</sup> This refers to York, Pennsylvania, where Congress was sitting, not to Yorktown, Virginia, where Cornwallis surrendered in 1781.

## GATES AND THE FRENCH ALLIANCE

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merce; . . . that his majesty was fixed in his determination not only to acknowledge, but to support our independence by every means in his power; that in doing this he might probably soon be engaged in war, with all the expenses, risk, and damage usually attending it, yet he should not expect any compensation from us on that account, nor pretend that he acted wholly for our sakes; since, besides his real good will to us and our cause, it was manifestly the interest of France that the power of England should be diminished by our separation from it. . . .

"We answered, that in what had been communicated to us we perceived and admired equally the king's magnanimity and his wisdom; that he would find us faithful and firm allies, and we wished, with his majesty, that the amity between the two nations might be eternal."

Other contemporary letters from France to the Congressional Committee for Foreign Affairs fully confirm the commissioners' report of the galvanizing and decisive effect of the news of Burgoyne's surrender. Arthur Lee wrote on December 8:

"Our joint dispatches will inform you of the forwardness in which things are here towards the desired conclusion. In three weeks we shall hear from Spain, and all will I hope be settled. The late intelligence from America has staggered and confounded our enemies as much as it has elated and decided our friends."

And on December 18, Ralph Izard of South Carolina, rejected commissioner from the United States to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, reported:

"The irresolute and indecisive state of the politics at the court of France, has for some time kept all Europe in suspense. The late success of our arms against General Burgoyne has given

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a fortunate turn to our affairs in this kingdom, and the conduct of the French ministry has confirmed me in an opinion I have long had, that the establishment of our liberties must depend upon our own exertions. One successful battle will gain us more friends, and do our business more effectually, than all the skill of the ablest negotiators."

A similar view is expressed in a letter of January 2, 1778, from William Lee,<sup>3</sup> rejected commissioner from the United States to Prussia and Austria, to Charles Thomson of Pennsylvania, secretary of the Continental Congress:

"It is with infinite pleasure that I congratulate Congress and America on the favorable change in our affairs in Europe since advice was received of the noble and spirited exertions of the northern army and militia in making General Burgoyne and his army prisoners. The purport of the last and present dispatches from the commissioners at the court of Versailles will show how pleasing the prospect before us is in this country at the present moment, which I hope will ripen into pleasant fruit."

The British were no less impressed than the French by the importance of Burgoyne's surrender. News of this blow reached the British Ministry by way of Quebec on December 2, and two days later, Lord North, the Prime Minister, wrote the King:

"the consequences of this most fatal event both in America and in foreign parts may be very important & serious, & will certainly require some material change of system." (Fortescue, *Correspondence of King George The Third*, III, 504.)

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<sup>3</sup> William and Arthur Lee were brothers of Richard Henry and Francis Lightfoot Lee. Though Virginia born, they were both living in London at the outbreak of the Revolution—Arthur as agent of Massachusetts and William as merchant and Alderman—where they remained for some time after the outbreak of war. They eventually returned to Virginia.

William Eden, one of the undersecretaries of State, in charge of the British Secret Service, sent Paul Wentworth, an acquaintance of both Franklin and Deane, to sound them out on the possibility of a settlement. Arriving in Paris by December 11, he conferred with Deane a few days later and with Franklin on January 6, 1778.<sup>4</sup> Caron de Beaumarchais, an ardent advocate of French intervention, hearing of Wentworth's presence, wrote Vergennes on December 17:

"Le mystérieux Anglais s'appelle *Mr Wintweth*. Il est parent du marquis *de Rokingham*; ami particulier du Lord Suffolk; employé par tous les ministres dans les choses difficiles; tenant autant à l'opposition qu'au royalisme: c'est à dire, prêt à vivre à deux rateliers. Sa commission est de découvrir à quel point la France en est avec l'Amérique et de tâter la députation pour savoir, par leur adhésion ou éloignement, quel est leur espoir ou leur crainte de votre côté. . . .

"Ce *M<sup>r</sup> Wintweth* parle français comme vous et mieux que moi. C'est un des hommes les plus adroits de l'Angleterre. Il fit déjà l'an passé des efforts à Paris pour le mesme objet. . . .

"On dit qu'il y a eu une sédition à Londres, ou beaucoup de gens ont perdu la vie; mais je n'en ai aucune nouvelle directe. On ajoute qu'on crie *tollé* sur le ministère et *guerre* contre la France. Ce qui veut dire en bon Anglais *paix* avec l'Amérique. Le moment me paraît suprême, et je vous prie de m'entendre la dessus." (Doniol, *Histoire*, II, 685-86.)

The French Court, well aware through this and other sources of Wentworth's presence in Paris and its significance, and fearful that he might strike a bargain with the American commissioners, decided to close with the Ameri-

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<sup>4</sup> Wentworth to Eden; December 17, 1777 and January 7, 1778 (Stevens, *Facsimiles*, II, No. 231 and V, No. 489.)

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cans even though Spain had declined to participate. On February 6, 1778, Louis XVI acknowledged the independence of the United States and entered into treaties of commerce and alliance with the new nation. The thrilling news was sent to the Committee of Foreign Affairs in the following letter of February 8 from Franklin and Deane:

"Sir: We have now the great satisfaction of acquainting you and the Congress that the treaties with France are at length completed and signed. The first is a treaty of amity and commerce, much on the plan of that projected in Congress; the other is a treaty of alliance, in which it is stipulated that in case England declares war against France, or occasions a war by attempts to hinder her commerce with us, we should then make common cause of it and join our forces and councils, etc. The great aim of this treaty is declared to be to 'establish the liberty, sovereignty, and independency, absolute and unlimited, of the United States, as well in matters of government as commerce;' and this is guarantied to us by France, together with all the countries we possess or shall possess at the conclusion of the war; in return for which the States guaranty to France all its possessions in America. We do not now add more particulars, as you will soon have the whole by a safer conveyance, a frigate being appointed to carry our dispatches."

On March 19, 1778, the British broke off diplomatic relations with France, and on the 28th Louis XVI wrote his "Very Dear and Great Friends and Allies," the Congress of the United States, that he was

"sending a fleet to endeavor to destroy the English forces upon the shores of North America,"

and had

"appointed M. Gerard, secretary of our council of state, to reside near you in quality of our minister plenipotentiary."

On April 5, 1778, the French fleet under the command of Count D'Estaing, carrying Monsieur Gérard to his new post, set sail from Toulon, and, after a tedious voyage, reached the Delaware in early July. Gérard, in time, came to know and admire Washington, but this was months after the French Alliance had been signed. Fitzpatrick's statement that the "deciding element" in securing the Alliance was not Gates' victory over Burgoyne but the confidence which Gérard came to have in Washington after "long interviews with him," is a figment of the imagination. Prior to the Alliance, Gérard had never set foot on the American continent, and Washington, except for a brief visit to Barbados as a youth, was never outside of it. The evidence is overwhelming that the deciding element was not Washington's character or battles but Burgoyne's surrender to Gates at Saratoga.

The facts and conclusion set forth in this chapter are not novel. They have been brought out by Bemis, Corwin, Van Tyne and other historians. But, in view of the standing and influence of Fitzpatrick and of the *Dictionary of American Biography*, it seems worth while to cover the ground again in this book.



## CHAPTER X

### GATES AND THE HISTORIANS

THOSE who have followed me sympathetically thus far must wonder why the historians have been so unfair to Gates.

In searching for the solution, it must be borne in mind, first of all, that many of the writers on the American Revolution, including the brilliant Trevelyan, wrote from a point of view nearer that of the historical novelist than that of the scholar. They were of course interested in the facts, but only in so far as these were consistent with their preconceived literary pattern; a pattern which demanded not only melodramatic incidents and a hero of flawless virtue and judgment, but a villain or congeries of villains to bring into relief the hero's trials and triumphs over colossal odds.

To the historians of this school, the melodramatic possibilities of the suffering of the Continental soldiers at Valley Forge, for example, are a veritable god-send. But since Washington, the hero of their tale, is generally known not to have shared the physical privations of his men, it is imperative that his mental suffering be exquisite. And what could be more painful than the realization on his part that Congress and some of his military associates, far from paying him the gratitude and homage to which his abilities and sacrifices entitled him, were conspiring to oust him from command? For Fiske or Trevelyan to abandon this

tradition because of insufficient evidence to support it, would be unthinkable, because, had it not existed, the requirements of their method would have forced them to discover a similar one.

To this group I would add writers like Washington Irving, who would disregard any evidence that might be construed as unfavorable to Washington, because of their conviction that the function of the historian is to play up the virtues of dead heroes for the edification of their readers.

A second group, including Bancroft, Channing, and the Fords, doubtless wished to present an honest, as distinguished from a melodramatic or edifying, picture of the Revolution, but they apparently started with so religious a devotion to Washington as to be incapacitated from dealing fairly with Gates (or anyone else) in his relations to their god. Washington had set his face against Gates, and it was therefore irrelevant whether the latter was guilty or not of the particular blunders and improprieties charged to him. For, if innocent of these, he must have been guilty of others equally gross to have merited the divine wrath.

A third group, including most of the professional historians of the present generation, have faced and told the whole truth in so far as they could find it. But the general historian is necessarily dependent to a large extent on the spade-work of others, and Gates occupies the unlucky position of being one of the few prominent figures in the American Revolution who wrote no memoirs of his own and has had neither a biographer nor an editor of his letters to put in a good word for him. Consequently every adulatory biographer of Washington, apologist for Arnold, trumpet-blower for Schuyler, and rhapsodist over Lafayette can

eulogize the virtues of his hero at the expense of Gates, without running foul of published material exposing his distortions. He is, likewise, immune from exposure by Gates' descendants (Gates lost his only child, Robert, during the Revolution), patrioteers (Gates was a hyphenate, an Englishman born and bred),<sup>1</sup> or even book reviewers, who do not have the time to go beyond the published sources.

Most unfortunate of all, from the standpoint of Gates' reputation, the published work commonly used as the source book for the main events of his career—Wilkinson's *Memoirs of My Own Times*—was written by a man who was singularly dishonest;<sup>2</sup> who, as we have seen in Chapter VI, was an enemy of Gates, and who was describing events thirty-five or more years after they occurred. By including unpublished letters and other documents of historical value, fully and accurately transcribed, Wilkinson gave a stamp of scholarship to his book and thus gained credence for statement after statement, favorable to himself or inimical to those he disliked, which are utterly unsupported by any evidence other than his own bare assertion.

According to Wilkinson, Gates slipped away without leave to Baltimore, where Congress was sitting, at the critical moment of Washington's attack on the Hessians at

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<sup>1</sup> This satisfying fact was not overlooked by the inimitable Fiske, who, in coupling Gates with General Charles Lee as worthy of "lasting ignominy," adds: "It is with pleasure that one recalls the fact that these men were not Americans, though both possessed estates in Virginia; it is with regret that one is forced to own them as Englishmen." (*The American Revolution*, I, 151.)

<sup>2</sup> The persistent dishonesty of this clever adventurer is brought out in Jacobs' recent, well-documented biography *Tarnished Warrior, Major-General James Wilkinson*.

Trenton in December 1776 (126-128), cheated Schuyler out of the deserved credit for defeating Burgoyne (222), spent his time, while others were winning the important battle of Bemis Heights, in a heated argument with the dying Sir Francis Clark, whom he called an "impudent son of a b—h" for upholding the English side of the controversy (269), behaved stupidly in his negotiations with Burgoyne over the surrender and then lied to Congress to conceal his stupidity (302-304), treated Wilkinson abominably (385), and, when Wilkinson called him to account for his perfidy, got out of fighting the duel by a hypocritical display of paternal solicitude (387-389). And these canards, for which there is no shred of corroboration, have been swallowed hook, line, and sinker by one historian after the other.

But Gates is not the only victim of unfair appraisal by the historians of the Revolution. The members of the Continental Congress, and particularly the delegates from New England, have suffered a similar fate, partly for their support of Gates and their supposed participation in the alleged Conway Cabal, but also in connection with other war measures. The unfairness of criticizing them for supporting Gates and promoting Conway has been brought out above. The next four chapters will show that much of the other censure to which they have been subjected is equally undeserved.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE NEW ENGLAND CONGRESS- MEN AND WASHINGTON

"Equally bitter to the New England delegates and their allies were certain army measures that Washington pressed upon the attention of Congress. . . . and most unpopular of all, that since Continental soldiers could not otherwise be obtained, a bounty should be given to secure them, and that as compensation for their inadequate pay half-pay should be given them after the war. He eventually carried these points, but at the price of an entire alienation of the democratic party in the Congress." (Paul Leicester Ford, *The True George Washington*, 1896, pp. 286-87.)

THE members of the New England or democratic party in the Continental Congress unquestionably soon lost their initial, fervid admiration and enthusiasm for Washington. But there is no ground for the view that Washington's army measures were responsible for the cooling process, for until well into the year 1777, he and Congress were in almost perfect accord on all important army measures. As for the soldiers' bounty, the New England members were in favor of it even before Washington.<sup>1</sup>

A more reasonable explanation of the New Englanders' "alienation," if the cooling of their initial uncritical enthusi-

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<sup>1</sup> The matter of the bounty and the New Englanders' support of it are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

asm for him can be thus described, is that they felt Washington had ill repaid their good will by circulating derogatory statements about his New England officers and men. The facts supporting this explanation are as follows.

The feeling of solidarity among the New England colonies that had promptly brought all of them to the rescue of Massachusetts after Lexington and Concord was, on the whole, a source of great strength to the revolutionary movement. But it had an unfavorable side in that this very solidarity created alarm in some of the other colonies. At the outbreak of the Revolution settlers from New England were holding, and claiming for New Hampshire and Connecticut, lands now constituting the state of Vermont and most of western Pennsylvania, to which New York and Pennsylvania had a conflicting claim. If Congress supported the New England army in driving the British into the sea, what—thought solicitous patriots from the Middle and Southern colonies—was to prevent this army from securing for New England not only the lands already in dispute but also the vast unoccupied lands in the west owned by Virginia and the Carolinas? Even as late as October 16, 1775, General Nathanael Greene of Rhode Island deemed it necessary to write Samuel Ward, one of the delegates in Congress from his home colony:

“I can assure the gentlemen to the southward, that there could not be anything more abhorrent . . .” (to the troops of the New England colonies) “than an union of these Colonies for the purpose of conquering those of the South.” (Force, 4, III, 1077.)

Equally disturbing was the recognized difference in point of view between New England and the Southern and Mid-

dle colonies, described in a letter of November 25, 1775, from John Adams to his friend, Joseph Hawley of Northampton, Massachusetts:

"Gentlemen in other colonies have large plantations of slaves, and the common people among them are very ignorant and very poor. These gentlemen are accustomed, habituated to higher notions of themselves, and the distinction between them and the common people, than we are. And an instantaneous alteration of the character of a colony, and that temper and those sentiments which its inhabitants imbibed with their mother's milk, and which have grown with their growth and strengthened with their strength, cannot be made without a miracle. I dread the consequences of this dissimilitude of character, and without the utmost caution on both sides, and the most considerate forbearance with one another, and prudent condescension on both sides, they will certainly be fatal."

The obvious way to reassure those outside New England was to replace Artemas Ward of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, chief of the Massachusetts army and leader by courtesy of the other New England forces, by an officer from one of the Middle or Southern colonies. Congress naturally favored someone known to its members, and the choice fell upon Colonel Washington of Virginia, the only one of the delegates that had had any considerable military experience.

The political reasons for choosing Washington as commander-in-chief in place of a New Englander were well stated in a letter of June 17, 1775, from Congressman Dyer of Connecticut to Joseph Trumbull, as follows:

"Coll Washington . . . is a Gent. highly Esteemd by those acquainted with him tho I dont believe as to his Military and for real service he knows more than some of ours but so it

## THE NEW ENGLAND CONGRESSMEN

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removes all jealousies, more firmly Cements the Southern to the Northern, and takes away the fear of the former lest an Enterprising eastern New England Genll. proving Successfull, might with his Victorious Army give law to the Southern or Western Gentry. this made it absolutely Necessary in point of prudence."

Washington himself was equally well aware that his merits were not the sole reason for his election, as brought out in his letter of June 20 to the "Captains of Several Independent Companies in Virginia" stating that "the partiality of the Congress . . . assisted by a political motive" had been responsible.

Washington was thus, from the beginning, recognized as more than a military commander; he was the first, and for some time the sole, emblem of *Continental*, as distinguished from provincial or sectional solidarity. The rebel colonies had no national flag, no national anthem, not even a common tradition (except that stemming from the enemy); but they now had a national symbol—their Commander-in-Chief—on which to focus their patriotic impulses and through which such impulses could be aroused and strengthened.

Fully realizing that the first step toward promoting solidarity was to insure Washington a warm welcome in their native provinces, the New England delegates wrote home glowing reports of the new Commander-in-Chief. John Adams praised him to the skies. On June 17 he wrote his wife:

"I can now inform you that the Congress have made choice of the modest and virtuous, the amiable, generous, and brave George Washington, Esquire, to be General of the American army, and that he is to repair, as soon as possible, to the camp



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before Boston. This appointment will have a great effect in cementing and securing the union of these colonies. . . .

"I hope the people of our province will treat the General with all that confidence and affection, that politeness and respect, which is due to one of the most important characters in the world." (John Adams, *Familiar Letters*, pp. 65-66.)

On the following day he wrote his friend Elbridge Gerry, a leading member of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress:

"There is something charming to me in the conduct of Washington. A gentleman of one of the first fortunes upon the Continent, leaving his delicious retirement, his family and friends, sacrificing his ease, and hazarding all in the cause of his Country." (Force 4, II, 1020.)

Dyer wrote Joseph Trumbull on June 17:

"I believe he will be Very agreeable to our officers and Soldiery. . . . he seems discreet and Virtuous, no harum Starum ranting Swearing fellow but Sober, steady, and Calm."

And on June 16, Silas Deane of Connecticut wrote his wife:

"Gen<sup>l</sup> Washington . . . , sacrificing private fortune, independent ease, and every domestic pleasure, sets off at his Country's call, to exert himself in her defence, without so much as returning to bid adieu to a fond partner and family. Let our Youth look up to this man as a pattern to form themselves by; who unites the bravery of the soldier with the most consummate modesty and virtue." (*Deane Papers*, I, 59.) <sup>2-3</sup>

Upon his arrival at headquarters, Washington found an

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<sup>2-3</sup> On September 10, 1774, Deane had written his wife the following first impression of Washington: "Col. Washington is nearly as tall a man as Col. Fitch, and almost as hard a countenance; yet with a very young look and an easy, soldierlike air, and gesture."

army of over 15,000 men composed of excellent material, but lacking in equipment, training, and discipline. On July 20, 1775, the experienced Englishman, General Charles Lee, wrote Benjamin Rush:

"the materials here (I mean the private men) are [admira]ble —had they proper uniforms, arms, and proper officers, their zeal, youth, bodily strength, good humour [and dext]erity, must make 'em an invincible army." (*Lee Papers*, I, 196.)

As a general rule, the men were of the same social status as their officers and were prepared to take orders from them only in so far as the latter demonstrated their superior resourcefulness or military knowledge. The number of such officers was small and the progress toward creating a well-disciplined army correspondingly slow.

Unfortunately, Washington's conception of the way to develop his raw material into a well-disciplined army was not so much by unremitting drill as by instilling in the men such terror of their officers that they would prefer the risk of death or wounds on the battlefield to the punishment they would receive if they ran away from the enemy. This appears from his letter of February 9, 1776, to the President of Congress, in which he said:

"Three things prompt Men to a regular discharge of their Duty in time of Action: natural bravery, hope of reward, and fear of punishment. The two first are common to the untutor'd, and the Disciplin'd Soldiers; but the latter, most obviously distinguishes the one from the other."

It likewise appears from his constant resort to the most brutal floggings.<sup>4-5</sup>

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<sup>4-5</sup> The tale of the heavier and heavier floggings inflicted on the soldiers in Washington's army during the progress of the Revolution is, for obvious reasons, not a pleasant one, but those interested will find my notes on the matter in the Appendix to this chapter.

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In view of his limited military training and experience, we can easily understand Washington's failure as a disciplinarian. But his recklessness in pouring forth to his correspondents in various colonies outside New England a stream of abuse of his New England officers and men was indefensible. Forethought would have warned him that this would heighten, not reduce, the intersectional passions and prejudices which he, above all others, was in a position and under obligation to allay.<sup>6</sup>

On August 20, 1775, Washington wrote Lund Washington, his distant cousin and plantation manager in Virginia, reporting that he had already "broke one Colo. and five Captains," and declaring that:

"The People of this government have obtained a Character which they by no means deserved; their officers generally speaking are the most indifferent kind of People I ever saw. . . . I dare say the Men would fight very well (if properly Officered) although they are an exceeding dirty and nasty people."

On August 29 he wrote Richard Henry Lee, reporting that he had "made a pretty good slam among such kind of officers as the Massachusetts Government abound in" and declaring that:

"it is among the most difficult tasks I ever undertook in my life to induce these people to believe that there is, or can be, danger till the Bayonet is pushed at their Breasts; not that it proceeds from any uncommon prowess, but rather from an unaccountable kind of stupidity in the lower class of these

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<sup>6</sup> My point holds good even if Washington's harsh generalizations, about to be quoted, were justified. But it is doubtful that the New England officers and men were, on the whole, as inferior as Washington's letters imply.

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people which, believe me, prevails but too generally among the officers of the Massachusetts *part* of the Army who are *nearly* of the same kidney with the privates."

And on November 28, he wrote his former military secretary, Joseph Reed of Philadelphia, that:

"Such a dearth of public spirit, and want of virtue, such stock-jobbing, and fertility in all the low arts to obtain advantages of one kind or another, in this great change of military arrangement," (re-enlistment of the New England troops and re-arrangement of regimental and company officers) "I never saw before, and pray God I may never be witness to again. . . . such a dirty, mercenary spirit pervades the whole, that I should not be at all surprised at any disaster that may happen."

His letters to his particular friends in Congress, Harrison of Virginia and Lynch of South Carolina, have not been preserved. But some inkling of what he said to them about the New Englanders may be gathered from their replies to him. Harrison wrote him from Congress on July 21, 1775:

"I Rec'd your very acceptable favour of the 10th inst. by Express. Your fatigue and various kinds of trouble I dare say are great, but they are not more than I expected, knowing the people you have to deal with by the Sample we have here."

Lynch wrote on November 13:

"Do not bate them an Ace, my Dear General, but depend on every Support of your Friends here. I have strove to keep two Battalions now raising in the Jersey's and one here quite disengaged that they may be ready, on a call to join you, should those you have desert you."

and again on December 8:

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"Your favour, by Captain Blewer, gives me infinite concern . . . O! had you but an army. . . . One of our members of Congress" (John Adams) "sets out to-day for *New-England*. Whether his intents be wicked or not, I doubt much; he should be watched." (Force 4, IV, 218.)

True, the flow of indiscretions was finally stopped by a word of warning from Reed, to whom Washington replied on December 15, 1775:

"I am much obliged to you for the hints contained in both of the above letters, respecting the jealousies<sup>7</sup> which you say are gone abroad. I have studiously avoided in all letters intended for the public eye, I mean for that of the Congress, every expression that could give pain or uneasiness; and I shall observe the same rule with respect to private letters, further than appears absolutely necessary for the elucidation of facts."

But the damage had been done. Dyer, for example, wrote Joseph Trumbull from Philadelphia on December 16, 1775:

"Poor Connecticut Troops have lost (here) all their fame and all their glory. you will Scarce hear any thing but execrations against them."

And about September 30, 1776, John Adams wrote Henry Knox:

"Pray tell me, Colonel Knox, does every man to the southward of Hudson's River behave like a hero, and every man to the northward of it like a poltroon, or not? . . . I must say that your amiable General gives too much occasion for these reports

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<sup>7</sup> The word "jealousy" was used more frequently in the sense of "apprehension" than in the sense of "envy," in the eighteenth century. "Want" is another common word whose meaning must be read with discrimination in the eighteenth-century writings. It was more often used in the sense of "need" than of "wish."

by his letters, in which he often mentions things to the disadvantage of some part of New England, but seldom any thing of the kind about any other part of the continent." (Adams, *Works*, I, 256.)

It is, of course, impossible to be certain of the dominant cause of the coolness that developed on the part of the New England congressmen toward Washington. But is it not reasonable to believe that they were simply reacting in the normal human way to the behavior of a person, who, having been warmly received, proceeds to spread unkind gossip about his hosts?

As to the soldiers' bounty the facts are as follows: In colonial days the militia could be called out only for a few weeks' period of service within its own colony. Men required for longer periods of service—or for service outside the colony—were specially recruited and the recruits were given a bounty on enlistment or re-enlistment, in addition to their base pay. In one year of the French and Indian War the bounty ran as high as £14.

In enlisting their armies for eight months' service in the spring of 1775, all four of the New England colonies followed the established custom of giving a bounty; Rhode Island, the most liberal, gave a month's extra pay plus a knapsack and blanket, which, since the men were supposed to furnish their own guns, clothing, and other equipment, were regarded as a form of bounty. And if the struggle against England had been continued by the New England colonies alone, they presumably would, as a matter of course, have offered their men a bounty on enlistment or re-enlistment.

But by the time the question of re-enlistments arose, the

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New England army had been taken over by the Continental Congress, made up for the most part of delegates from other colonies. Some of these delegates considered that even the base pay given the New England troops was excessive. John Adams advised Elbridge Gerry on June 18, 1775:

"Those ideas of equality, which are so agreeable to us natives of New England, are very disagreeable to many gentlemen in the other colonies. They had a great opinion of the high importance of a continental general, and were determined to place him in an elevated point of light. They think the Massachusetts establishment too high for the privates, and too low for the officers, and they would have their own way."

The Committee of Congress, sent to confer with Washington at Cambridge in October 1775, was instructed to consider the possibility of reducing the pay of the men for the year 1776 from forty to thirty shillings a month. And while this suggestion for a reduction in base pay was disposed of by a finding of the committee that the proposed reduction was "absolutely impracticable" (Force 4, III, 1155-56) no bounty for enlistment or re-enlistment was recommended by the committee and none was provided for by Congress when it voted for the continuance of the Continental army on November 4, 1775.

As would be expected, the New England leaders, familiar with conditions at home, recognized from the first the justice and necessity of offering either higher wages or a bounty to the New England troops in the Continental army. On October 21, 1775, James Warren of Plymouth wrote John Adams:

"The bounty given on an average last war, I suppose might be set at £8; sometimes we gave £12, and one year £14, tho' at

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first less than £8, which will make at least 20/ per month to be added to 36/, the wages then given. We now give them a coat upon an average about 24/, which will make 3/ to be added to 40/. A blanket they had in both cases. It will from these facts be easy to infer that they then had 13/ at least per month more than now." (*Warren-Adams Letters*, I, 152.)

And on November 14, 1775, Joseph Hawley, the leading delegate in the Massachusetts Assembly from the western part of the province, wrote John Adams of the necessity for doing more for the men; saying:

"If your Congress does not give better encouragement to the privates than at present is held forth to them, you will have no winter army. There must be some small bounty given them on the enlistment. A strange mistaken opinion obtains among the gentlemen of the army from the southward, and if I mistake not, in your Congress, that our privates have too high wages, and the officers too low." (John Adams, *Works*, IX, 364.)

To this Adams replied on November 25:

"You tell me, Sir, that 'we shall have no winter army, if our Congress does not give better encouragement to the privates than at present is held forth to them,' and that 'there must be some small bounty given them on the enlistment.' What encouragement is held forth, or at least has been, I know not; but before this time, no doubt, they have been informed of the ultimatum of the Congress. No bounty is offered. Forty shillings lawful money per month, after much altercation, is allowed. It is undoubtedly true that an opinion prevails among the gentlemen of the army from the southward, and indeed throughout all the colonies, excepting New England, that the pay of the privates is too high, and that of the officers too low; so that you may easily conceive the difficulties we have had to surmount. You may depend upon it that this has cost many an anxious day



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and night; and the utmost that could be done, has been. . . . An alteration of the southern Constitutions, which must certainly take place if this war continues, will gradually bring all the continent nearer and nearer to each other in all respects. But this is the most critical moment we have yet seen. This winter will cast the die. For God's sake, therefore, reconcile our people to what has been done, for you may depend upon it that nothing more can be done here, and I should shudder at the thought of proposing a bounty. A burnt child dreads the fire."

But, though Adams himself may not have dared play with fire again, some member of Congress evidently did, because on November 30, 1775, Congress rejected a motion for a bounty. The New England congressmen were apparently so alarmed over this decision that Samuel Ward, the leading delegate from Rhode Island, wrote General Nathanael Greene, also of Rhode Island, about the matter, as we know (I have not been able to find Ward's letter) from Greene's reply of December 31, 1775:

"You entreat the General Officers to recommend to the Congress the giving of a bounty . . . What reason have you to think that a proposition of that sort, if it came recommended by General Officers, would be acceded to by the Congress? Most of the Generals belong to the Northern Governments; if the Congress refuse to hear their Delegates, I apprehend they would the Generals also." (Force, 4, IV, 482.)

Washington himself, far from urging Congress to grant a bounty at this time, appears to have approved the Congressional Committee's decision not to recommend one. This is indicated by the fact that his friend Thomas Lynch of South Carolina, one of the members of the committee, wrote him on November 13, "I am happy . . . that Congress

has agreed to every Recommendation of the Committee" and on January 16, 1776, "every thing you desired me to get done is accomplished."

The truth seems to be that Washington, readily able to support his own dependents, was blind to the necessity of paying the common soldiers, many with dependent wives and children, enough to support their families. Even after his men had shared over three years of hardship and danger with him, he wrote General William Maxwell of New Jersey on May 10, 1779:

"All that the common soldiery of any country can expect is food and cloathing. The pay given in other armies is little more than nominal, very low in the first instance and subject to a variety of deductions that reduce it to nothing. This is the case with the British troops though I believe they receive more than those of any of the European armies. The idea of maintaining the families at home, at public expence," (i.e., by paying the men enough to support them) "is peculiar to us; and is incompatible with the finances of any government. Our troops have been uniformly better fed than any others; they are at this time very well clad, and I hope will continue to be so. While this is the case they will have no just cause of complaint."

Washington knew that one of the principal reasons for the failure of New England troops to re-enlist was the lack of a bounty, as shown by his circular letter to the chief executive of each of the New England colonies on December 5, 1775, saying:

"I have of late met with abundant reason, to be convinced of the impracticability of Recruiting this Army to the New establishment, in any reasonable time by voluntary Inlistments. . . . Many reasons are Assigned; one only I shall mention, and that is, that the present Soldiery are in expectation of drawing from

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the landed Interest and Farmers, a bounty equal to the Commencement of this Army, and that therefore they play off."

Yet, though he wrote Congress on December 4, 11, 18, 25 and 31, concerning enlistments, he did not once mention the lack of a bounty as one of the causes of the dearth of enlistments or recommend that a bounty be granted.

His circular letter of December 5, 1775, indicates that he hoped that the men would be drafted if they refused to re-enlist without a bounty. But a successful draft was presumably beyond the power of the new, untried revolutionary governments, and this suggestion, after being put forward by him once more (January 10, 1776), was dropped. Massachusetts was prepared to solve the matter by paying a *provincial* bounty to Massachusetts soldiers who would enlist or re-enlist in the Continental army, but Washington discouraged this; saying (January 16, 1776) that it was never "my Idea, that you should offer a bounty at the separate expence of this Colony."

So much for Washington's position on the bounty during the critical weeks at the close of 1775. Sometime during the early part of 1776, he changed his mind, presumably because he was forced to by the discovery that Hawley's prediction "you will have no winter army" without "better encouragement to the privates" was well-founded. On February 9, 1776, he wrote Congress in favor of a bounty as a possible means of securing long-term enlistments. But even then he was indefinite on the vital question of just how much should be offered. Through his daily contact with the army, he was obviously the person best qualified to give the decisive word on this all-important question, but he merely advised Congress on June 9 to offer a "liberal" allowance and, on July 27, "a bounty in Land" of unspeci-

fied amount in addition to a cash bounty of \$10.00 already offered by Congress. On September 16, 1776, Congress provided for a bounty of \$20.00 in cash and a hundred acres of land for enlistments "to serve during the present war," to which it later (October 8) added an annual suit of clothes.

The facts stated above show that the New England members of Congress were not opposed to Washington's advocacy of a bounty for the enlisted men. The question of half pay for the officers did not arise until long after the affection of the New Englanders for Washington had cooled. It is therefore evident that these points of military policy were not responsible for the alienation.

## CHAPTER XII

### CONGRESS AND LONG-TERM ENLISTMENTS

"Fear of a standing army was another difficulty. Obsessed with this fear, in which the phantom of an accommodation with Great Britain played its part, Congress hesitated to decree long-term enlistments for the troops. Washington stood almost alone in his plea for men who could be held in service long enough to make them seasoned soldiers." (Biography of Washington by John C. Fitzpatrick in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, 1936.)

ON September 30, 1776, Washington wrote Lund Washington:

"This time last year I pointed out the evil consequences of short enlistments, the expenses of militia, and the little dependence that was to be placed in them. I assured that the longer they" (the members of Congress) "delayed raising a standing army, the more difficult and chargeable would they find it to get one. . . ."

On November 19, 1776, he wrote his brother John Augustine:<sup>1</sup>

"Last fall or Winter, before the Army which was then to be raised, was set about, I represented in clear and explicit terms

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<sup>1</sup> Washington is particularly self-revealing in his letters to his brother, John Augustine—"Jack." His letters to his wife, Martha, may have been equally so, but only two of them have been preserved.

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the evils wch. would arise from short Inlistments, the expence that must attend the raising an Army every year, the futility of such an Army when raised; and, in a word, if I had spok with a prophetick Spirit, could not have foretold the evils with more accuracy than I did." (*Writings of Washington*, VI, 246.)

And in a letter of December 18, 1776, also to John Augustine, he said:

*"if every nerve is not strain'd to recruit the New Army with all possible expedition, I think the game is pretty near up, owing . . . principally to the accursed policy of short Inlistments, and placing too great a dependence on the Militia the Evil consequences of which were foretold 15 Months ago with a spirit almost Prophetick."*<sup>2</sup>

These letters, of course, give countenance to the accepted view that almost from the beginning Washington favored and Congress blocked long-term enlistments. But other evidence, especially a neglected statement in one of Washington's own earlier letters, shows that Congress, not Washington, was the first to propose enlistments for the period of the war; that he at first discouraged the proposal; and that when he eventually recommended such enlistments, with the offer of a bounty as encouragement, Congress was immediately sympathetic and adopted his proposal more than three months before the men's then existing period of enlistment was due to expire.

In organizing their armies, after Lexington and Concord, the provincial Congresses of the New England colonies enlisted the men to serve until the end of the year

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<sup>2</sup> Washington made a similar assertion to Lund Washington in a letter written the day before.

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1775,<sup>8</sup> and when the Continental Congress adopted these New England troops on June 9, 1775, it necessarily took them for the period of service for which they were originally enlisted, and no longer. Congress' first resolutions with respect to enlistments on its own account were passed while Washington was still in Congress. On May 25, 1775, it resolved to engage a force of troops in New York to serve until December 31, 1775, and on June 14 to enlist several companies of riflemen in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia for one year. There is nothing to indicate that in either case Washington urged or favored longer periods of enlistment.

Furthermore, the Congressional Committee sent to confer with Washington in October 1775 recommended to Congress that the army be re-enlisted only to December 31, 1776 (Force, 4, III, 1158).<sup>8a</sup> And, as brought out on pages 118-19 above, Washington was apparently in entire agreement with the Committee's recommendations.

Far from Washington having pleaded and Congress hesitated with respect to long-term enlistments, the first recorded proposal for such enlistments was a resolution of Congress itself. This resolution, adopted November 10, 1775, provided for the enlistment of two battalions of marines "for and during the present war." The President of Congress, John Hancock, sent a copy of this resolution to Washington on the day it was passed. Now, if ever, was

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<sup>8</sup> This is precisely true of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. There was dangerous confusion as to the precise period for which the Connecticut men were enlisted, but the period did not extend beyond December 10, 1775.

<sup>8a</sup> This committee consisted of two of Washington's special friends—Thomas Lynch of South Carolina and Benjamin Harrison of Virginia—and Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania. The New England colonies were represented by delegates who were not members of Congress.

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the decisive time for him to plead for the enlistment of the entire army for the period of the war. The period of enlistment of the Connecticut troops was about to expire, and every reason in favor of enlisting the marines for the war applied with equal force to the troops generally. Congress could not with consistency propose the one and oppose the other. But Washington's response (November 28, 1775) was as follows:

"From what I can collect, by my inquiries amongst the Officers, It will be impossible to get the men to inlist for the continuance of the War, which will be an insuperable Obstruction to the formation of the two Battalions of Marines on the plan resolved on in Congress."

If the marines could not be induced to enlist for the war, what possible deduction could Congress draw but that it would be equally impossible to enlist the army as a whole on this basis? At this critical juncture therefore, Washington, far from pleading with Congress for enlistments for the period of the war, virtually informed it that such a plan of enlistment was impracticable. On December 5, 1775, Congress reversed its previous action on the marines and resolved that they be enlisted to serve only until January 1, 1777; that is, for slightly over a year.

Within ten weeks after his letter of November 28, Washington evidently changed his mind, for on February 9, 1776, he wrote Congress as follows:

"I shall with all due deference, take the freedom to give it as my opinion, that if the Congress have any reason to believe, that there will be occasion for Troops another year, and consequently of another inlistment, they would save money, and have infinitely better Troops if they were, even at the bounty



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of twenty, thirty or more Dollars to engage the Men already Inlisted ('till January next) and such others as may be wanted to compleat to the Establishment, for and during the War.— I will not undertake to say that the Men may be had upon these terms, but I am satisfied that it will never do to let the matter alone as it was last year, till the time of service was near expiring.”

This letter of Washington, indicating that he now thought it possible that the men might be prevailed upon to enlist for the period of the war, provided they were offered a bounty, was promptly given serious consideration by Congress. This is shown by the notes on a debate in Congress February 22, 1776, jotted down by James Duane of New York (there was no official report during the War of the debates in Congress), in which he records the sentiments of several members on this question. Roger Sherman of Connecticut said:

“Long enlistment is a state of slavery. there ought to be a rotation which is in favor of liberty.”<sup>4</sup>

But this was apparently not the prevailing view, even among Sherman's fellow New England congressmen, for Duane records that Samuel Adams said:

“Never has been proposed to enlist soldiers during the war. never tried.

“Moves that we take into consideration the lengthening the time of enlistment.”

And that John Adams added:

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<sup>4</sup> This and the immediately succeeding entries from Duane's notes are published in Burnett, *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, I, 360.

## CONGRESS AND LONG-TERM ENLISTMENTS

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"In favor of the proposition for raising men during the war, but not to depend upon it, as men must be averse to it—war may last 10 years."

The receptive attitude of the two leading New Englanders, indicated by Duane's notes, likewise appears in contemporary letters from them and their colleague, Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts. On June 25, 1776, Gerry wrote General Gates shortly after his appointment to the command of the American army in Canada:

"I put it down as a settled, fixed principle, that they must be enlisted for the war, let the necessary encouragement be what it may, which I am happy to find the Generals agreed in, and I think most of the members of Congress."

On August 16, Samuel Adams, who was temporarily back in Massachusetts, wrote John Adams at Philadelphia:

"I see now more than I ever did the Importance of Congress attending immediately to Enlistments for the next Campaign. It would be a pity to lose your old Soldiers. I am of Opinion that a more generous Bounty sh<sup>d</sup> be given, 20 Dollars & 100 Acres of Land for three years at least." (*Writings of Samuel Adams*, III, 310.)

And on August 19, 1776, John Adams wrote General Parsons of Connecticut:

"With regard to encouragements in money and in land for soldiers to enlist during the war, I have ever been in favor of it, as the best economy and the best policy." (John Adams, *Works*, IX, 431.)

On September 16, 1776, more than three months before the period of enlistment of the 1776 men was to expire, Congress provided for enlistment for the period of the war,

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offering a bounty in cash and land. If similar provision had been made before the close of 1775, the results might have been more satisfactory. But, as previously stated, Washington, as much as Congress, was responsible for the tardiness in adopting this salutary measure.

It may be asked why the historians have blindly accepted Washington's assertions that he had anticipated Congress in pointing out the desirability of long-term enlistments when one of his own letters shows the opposite. Conceivably the answer lies in a footnote on page 442 of Volume IV of Ford's edition of the *Writings of Washington*, appended to Washington's statement in his letter to Congress of September 24, 1776, that he had previously written Congress recommending enlistments for the war. This footnote reads "Vol. III, 106." Turning to the cited page, the reader finds a long letter on various matters from Washington to Congress dated August 31, 1775. Anyone who reads the letter will find that it contains no reference whatsoever to enlistments, but a person who merely looked at its date would gain the impression from Ford's footnote that Washington had recommended long-term enlistments as early as August 31, 1775.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>I do not mean to imply that Ford was intentionally misleading. Washington's letter of February 9, 1776, in which he recommended enlistments for the war, is published in Ford, III, 406, and the printing III, 106" was presumably a typographical error.

## CHAPTER XIII

### FORT WASHINGTON

"This capture of the garrison of Fort Washington was one of the most crushing blows that befell the American arms during the whole course of the war. . . . The disaster was primarily due to the interference of Congress. It might have been averted by prompt and decisive action on the part of Greene. But Washington, whose clear judgment made due allowance for all the circumstances, never for a moment cast any blame upon his subordinate." (Fiske, *American Revolution*, 1891, I, 221.)

As soon as the British troops and fleet left Boston, Washington, fearing that they might be headed for New York City, moved there in April 1776 with the bulk of his army. Only a small detachment was left at Boston under General Ward, Washington's second in command.

Despite the occasional capture of a British merchantman or transport by American vessels, England's supremacy on the sea was unchallenged. Consequently, one of Washington's first acts at New York was to erect land batteries to prevent British men-of-war from running up the Hudson and cutting the communications between New England and eastern New York on the one hand, and the Middle and Southern colonies on the other. The most important battery was erected on a high point of land at the north-western end of Manhattan Island, near what is now the

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corner of 183d Street and Fort Washington Avenue, New York City. This post, named Fort Washington, was complemented on the New Jersey side by Fort Lee.

The British moved to Halifax, pending the arrival of reinforcements from Europe. When these arrived Howe transported his army from Halifax to Staten Island in New York harbor, and, on August 27, 1776, attacked and badly defeated the Americans at the battle of Long Island. Forced by this defeat to evacuate New York City, Washington took up a position on Harlem Heights, not far from Fort Washington. In October Howe's transfer of a large part of his army to Throg's Neck, a little east of the Bronx River on the north shore of Long Island Sound, made it necessary for Washington to shift most of his troops to the mainland for the protection of Westchester County and southwestern Connecticut. But he left a large garrison at Fort Washington, which Howe pounced upon and captured on November 16, 1776.

The losses at Fort Washington were greater than any others suffered by the Americans prior to the fall of Charleston, South Carolina, in 1780. The British loss was under 500, while Washington lost over 2,900 of his best troops, most of them captured, besides 43 guns and a large amount of ammunition and other precious military stores. (Howe to Lord George Germain, Secretary of State for the Colonies, November 30, 1776; and return by Joshua Loring, British Commissary of Prisoners, dated December 1, 1776; Force, 5, III, 925 and 1057.) Worst of all, these losses were regarded by many as a needless sacrifice, and had an extremely bad effect on the American morale. Fort Lee was hastily abandoned with further heavy losses of supplies on November 20, 1776, and within a few weeks

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the British overran all of central New Jersey and also occupied Newport, Rhode Island, the second most important town in New England.

The contemporary account of the Fort Washington disaster on which Fiske and other historians presumably have relied, is that contained in a letter of November 19, 1776, from Washington to his brother, John Augustine, reading in part as follows:

"This is a most unfortunate affair, and has given me great Mortification as we have lost not only two thousand Men that were there, but a good deal of Artillery, and some of the best Arms we had. And what adds to my Mortification is, that this Post, after the last Ships went past it, was held contrary to my Wishes and opinion; as I conceived it to be a dangerous one: but being determind on by a full Council of General Officers, and recieving a resolution of Congress strongly expressive of their desires, that the Channel of the River (which we had been labouring to stop for a long time at this place) might be obstructed, if possible; and knowing that this could not be done unless there were Batteries to protect the obstruction I did not care to give an absolute order for withdrawing the Garrison till I could get round and see the Situation of things and then it became too late as the Fort was Invested. I had given it, upon the passing of the last Ships, as my opinion to Genl. Greene, under whose care it was, that it would be best to evacuate the place; but, as the order was discretionary, and his opinion differed from mine, it unhappily was delayed too long." (*Writings of Washington*, VI, 244.)

By a careless reading of this paragraph and by shutting his eyes to other evidence, Fiske could reach the conclusion that "the disaster was primarily due to the interference of Congress." But the fact is that Congress was blame-

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less and that the final responsibility for the misguided decision to hold the Fort rests on Washington.

Congress' connection with the affair was as follows. On October 9, 1776, Washington sent a hasty note to Congress reporting that a number of British warships and tenders had been able to sail up the Hudson between Fort Lee and Fort Washington, without impaling themselves on the barriers sunk in the river or receiving serious damage from the fire of the forts. (*Writings of Washington*, VI, 184.) Congress immediately (October 11) resolved:

"That General Washington be desired, if it be practicable, by every art, and whatever expence, to obstruct effectually the navigation of the North river, between Fort Washington and Mount Constitution, as well to prevent the regress of the enemies' frigates lately gone up, as to hinder them from receiving succours."

Upon receipt of this resolve, Washington gave orders (October 14) to increase the obstructions in the river as fast as possible, and, for several weeks, apparently believed that the new obstructions were effective.

But on November 7, General Greene, who was in command of Forts Washington and Lee, with his headquarters at the latter post, wrote Washington that, although "prodigiously shattered" in doing so, some British ships had again run the gauntlet. (Greene, *Greene*, I, 261.) Washington, of course, recognized that, since the main reason for establishing and maintaining Fort Washington had been to block the passage of the Hudson, a vitally new situation was now presented. He replied to Greene on November 8:

"The late passage of the 3 Vessels up the North River (which we have just received advice of) is so plain a Proof of the

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Inefficacy of all the Obstructions we have thrown into it, that I cannot but think, it will fully Justify a Change in the disposition which has been made. If we cannot prevent Vessels passing up, and the Enemy are possessed of the surrounding Country, what valuable purpose can it answer to attempt to hold a Post from which the expected Benefit cannot be had; I am therefore inclined to think it will not be prudent to hazard the men and Stores at Mount Washington, but as you are on the Spot, leave it to you to give such Orders as to evacuating Mount Washington as you Judge best and so far revoking the Order given Colo. Magaw to defend it to the last."

The resolution of Congress of October 11 was obviously not an order that Fort Washington be held under all circumstances, and Washington's letter of November 8 shows that he realized this. For he obviously would not have directed his junior officer on November 8, "to give such Orders as to evacuating Mount Washington as you Judge Best" if he had not understood that he himself had full discretion to evacuate the post. Nor did Congress do anything after November 8 to limit his discretion. The view that Congress was responsible for the disaster is therefore clearly unjust.<sup>1</sup>

As between Washington and Greene the facts are less simple.

It is perfectly clear that Greene received Washington's letter of November 8 the next day, and that it would then still have been possible to abandon Fort Washington and

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<sup>1</sup> In the month following the loss of Fort Washington, and again in the fall of 1777, Congress fled from Philadelphia. Stephenson and Dunn, in their recent *George Washington*, II, 39, say: "That cowardly body, which had fled from the face of danger, vented its own shame in abuse of the general" (Washington) "and plotted to bury him in disgrace." As shown in the Appendix to this chapter, there is reason to doubt the justice of this charge.



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concentrate the strength of Greene's forces on the defense of Fort Lee. This appears from the following letter of November 9 from Greene to Washington:

"Your Excellency's letter of the 8th this moment came to hand. . . . The passing of the ships up the river is, to be sure, a full proof of the insufficiency of the obstructions in the river to stop the ships from going up; but that garrison employs double the men to invest it that we have to occupy it. They must keep troops at King's Bridge to prevent a communication with the country; and they dare not leave a very small number, for fear our people should attack them.

"Upon the whole, I cannot help thinking the garrison is of advantage; and I cannot conceive the garrison to be in any great danger. The men can be brought off at any time, but the stores may not be so easily removed; yet I think they can be got off in spite of them, if matters grow desperate." (Greene, *Greene*, I, 264.)

At this stage therefore Greene was clearly responsible for the failure to evacuate the garrison at Fort Washington.

But between November 9 and the time Howe attacked (November 16), Washington joined Greene at his headquarters at Fort Lee. Washington arrived some time (the hour not ascertained) on November 13, as is shown by a letter of November 14 from him to Congress, which is headed "General Greene's Quarters" and speaks of his "arrival here yesterday." Washington's arrival at about that date is also indicated by a letter of November 17 from Greene to General Knox, in which he states: "His Excellency General Washington has been with me for several days." (Drake, *Knox*, p. 33.) The crucial question therefore is whether or not something had developed between November 9 and November 13 (the date of Washing-

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ton's arrival at Greene's headquarters) which made it no longer possible to evacuate the garrison of Fort Washington?

In his letter of November 19, 1776, to his brother, previously quoted, Washington implied that there had been such a development, saying:

"I did not care to give an absolute order" (in the letter of November 8 to Greene) "for withdrawing the Garrison till I could get round and see the Situation of things and then it became too late as the Fort was Invested."<sup>2</sup>

But other evidence indicates that this statement was untrue.

Foremost is Washington's own letter of November 14 to Congress, stating that:

"From every information, the whole" (of Howe's army) "have removed from Dobb's ferry towards Kingsbridge, and it seems to be generally believed on all hands, that the investing of Fort Washington is one object they have in view.—But that can employ but a small part of their force. Whether they intend a Southern expedition must be determined by time."

The obvious implication of this letter is that Fort Washington was not yet invested at that time. This view is confirmed by the letter of November 17 from Greene to Knox, previously quoted, in which Greene said:

"Your favor of the 14th reached me in a melancholy temper. The misfortune of losing Fort Washington, with between two and three thousand men, will reach you before this, if it has not already. His Excellency General Washington has been with me for several days. The evacuation or reinforcement of Fort

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<sup>2</sup> "Invest," as a military term, then, as now, meant "to inclose; to surround so as to intercept succours or provisions." (Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, London, 1755.)

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Washington was under consideration, but finally nothing concluded on." (Drake, *Knox*, p. 33.)<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, even after Howe had attacked on the 16th Washington still thought there was a chance of evacuating the garrison at Fort Washington, as disclosed by a letter of that date from him to Congress, saying "I sent a Billet to Col Magaw, directing him to hold out, and I would endeavor this Evening to bring off the Garrison, if the Fortress could not be maintained."

What actually happened can be deduced from the remark in Washington's letter to Congress of November 14 that

"the investing of Fort Washington is one object they have in view.—But that can employ but a small part of their force."

This indicates that after Washington arrived at Greene's Headquarters on November 13, he reached the conclusion

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<sup>3</sup> Greene's letter of November 17 gives the following interesting account of events just before the surrender of Fort Washington: "Day before yesterday, about one o'clock, Howe's adjutant-general made a demand of the surrender of the garrison in the general's name, but was answered by the commanding officer that he should defend it to the last extremity. Yesterday morning, General Washington, General Putnam, General Mercer, and myself went to the island to determine what was best to be done; but just at the instant we stepped on board the boat the enemy made their appearance on the hill where the Monday action was, and began a severe cannonade with several field-peices. Our guards soon fled, the enemy advanced up to the second line. This was done while we were crossing the river and getting upon the hill. The enemy made several marches to the right and to the left,—I suppose to reconnoitre the fortifications and lines.

"There we all stood in a very awkward situation. As the disposition was made, and the enemy advancing, we durst not attempt to make any new disposition; indeed, we saw nothing amiss. We all urged his Excellency to come off. I offered to stay, General Putnam did the same, and so did General Mercer; but his Excellency thought it best for us all to come off together, which we did, about half an hour before the enemy surrounded the fort." (Drake, *Knox*, pp. 33-34.)

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that Howe was going to surround and besiege Fort Washington with only a small part of his force, while he employed the rest in some other expedition. What led Washington to make this incorrect surmise is not known. But once it was made, the holding of the Fort was logical, because, if Howe diverted only a small part of his force to the investment, the troops in the Fort could presumably hold out for months. In the meanwhile the Fort would keep part of Howe's force at bay and constitute a serious threat to the British line of communications. But Howe, as we have seen, took the wiser course of concentrating his entire force upon the capture of the garrison at Fort Washington before moving into New Jersey.

The final episode in the Fort Washington affair did not occur until 1785 when the Reverend William Gordon, in collecting material for his *History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment, of the Independence of the United States of America*, published in 1788, asked Washington about a supposed letter from him to Greene ordering the evacuation of Fort Washington. A reply along the following lines would have been truthful and strictly to the point:

I have your query concerning a letter which I am reputed to have written on the 8th of November, 1776, to General Greene, concerning the evacuation of Fort Washington. I did write General Greene a letter recommending the evacuation of the Fort, but, in fairness to him, I must point out that on November 13th, three days before the loss of the Fort, I arrived at his headquarters, and, being then in a position to judge for myself, concluded that the Fort should be held. As the senior officer present, I was of course responsible for the final decision and its consequences.

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But the reply which Washington actually wrote and sent (March 8, 1785) is of a radically different character. It is not strictly to the point; it drags in the old story about the resolution of Congress; and it makes no mention whatsoever of his arrival at Greene's headquarters three days before Howe's attack. It reads:

"The order alluded to in my private letter, a copy of which you requested, I now send. You might have observed, for I believe the same private letter takes notice thereof, that it was consequent of a resolve of Congress, that Fort Washington was so pertinaciously held, before the ships passed that post . . .

"But when, maugre all the obstructions which had been thrown into the channel, all the labor and expense which had been bestowed on the works, and the risks we had run of the garrison theretofore, the British ships of war had passed, and could pass those posts, it was clear to me from that moment, that they were no longer eligible, and that that on the east side of the river ought to be withdrawn whilst it was in our power. In consequence thereof, the letter of the 8th of November, 1776, was written to General Greene from the White Plains; that post and all the troops in the vicinity of it being under his orders. I give this information, and I furnish you with a copy of the order for the evacuation of Fort Washington, because you desire it, not that I want to exculpate myself from any censure, which may have fallen on me by charging another." (Ford, *Writings of Washington*, X, 443-44.) <sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Washington had apparently long had faith in the efficacy of protestations of this kind. While using his weight as commander of the Virginia troops to advance his private interests, he assured General Forbes' brigade major, Francis Halkett, in a letter dated August 2, 1758: "I am uninfluenced by Prejudice, having no hopes or fears but for the General Good. That be assur'd of, and my Sincere Sentiments are spoke on this occasion." This particular pronouncement fell flat, as disclosed by the following letter of August 9, 1758, from Forbes to his second in command, Colonel Henry Bouquet: "By a very unguarded

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If this letter of Washington was not designed to give the impression that Congress and Greene, and not he himself, was responsible for the loss of the garrison at Fort Washington, what was it supposed to imply?

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letter of Col: Washington that Accidentally fell into my hands, I am now at the bottom, of their scheme against this new road, a Scheme that I think was a shame for any officer to be Concerned in, but more of this at meeting." (James, *Writings of General John Forbes*, p. 171.)

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# CONGRESS AND THE SARATOGA CONVENTION

"The British soldiers were never shipped to England, were separated from their officers in violation of the terms, and after some months taken to Virginia where they gradually disappeared. In spite of the protests of Washington and other high-minded Americans, the supreme legislative body thus placed an indelible stain upon American honor." (James Truslow Adams, *The Burgoyne Expedition*, *The North American Review*, 1927, Vol. 224, p. 380.)

"With shameless ill faith they evaded the agreement to return the prisoners to England, under a series of pretexts, each flimsier than the last. In vain Washington and other of the American generals remonstrated, with all the indignation of gallant officers and honourable men." (Fortescue, *A History of the British Army*, 1911, III, 241-42.)

THE Convention of Saratoga of October 16, 1777, setting forth the conditions under which Burgoyne was to surrender his troops, provided that the troops were to give up their arms; that they were to be granted free passage to Great Britain, on condition of not serving again in North America during the war; and that British vessels were to be admitted to the port of Boston to pick up the troops.

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There were also a number of minor provisions. (Winsor, *Narrative and Critical History*, VI, 317.)

When the terms of the Convention got abroad, there was apprehension lest Burgoyne might transport his troops, once they were released, to Newport or New York for service again in America instead of sending them to England as the Convention required. The action of George II during the Seven Years' War (the French and Indian War, in America) in repudiating the Convention of Klosterzeven, by which the Duke of Cumberland had saved his army from destruction by the French,<sup>1</sup> was still remembered in America. Washington reminded Richard Henry Lee of this repudiation in the following letter of October 28, 1777:

"without great precaution, & very delicate management, we shall have all these men—if not the officers—opposed to us in the spring.—without the necessary precautions (as I have just observed) I think this will happen; and unless great delicacy is used in the precautions, a plea will be given them, & they will justify, a breach of the Covenant on their part—do they not declare (many of them) that no faith is to be held with Rebels?—did not the English do the very thing I am now suspecting them of, after the Convention of Closter Seven, upon changing their commander?—will they hold better faith with us than they did with the French?—I am persuaded, myself, that they will not—and yet, I do not see how it is to be prevented, without a direct violation of the articles ourselves, or, by attempting to guard against the evil, give them a plea of justification on theirs." (Ford, *Century Magazine*, Vol. 81, p. 663.)

When the thirty-five hundred prisoners reached Cambridge, the local officials, in spite of the protests of General

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<sup>1</sup> A good account of this affair is given in Charteris, *Cumberland*, II, Chapter 26.



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Heath, the Continental general in command in the Eastern Department, housed the captive officers in the same quarters as the common soldiers. This was a breach of one of the minor articles of the Saratoga Convention that "officers are to be quartered according to rank."<sup>2</sup> After frequent protests, Burgoyne, on November 10, wrote Heath, who had asked for the paroles which the Convention required the British officers to give:

"I am under the necessity, and I am persuaded you will partake my concern of returning to you the parole unsigned, the British regiments having unanimously insisted that the Convention is infringed in several circumstances, but particularly in the article expressing that every officer shall be quartered according to his rank." (*The Parliamentary Register*, 1779, XI, Appendix, p. iv.)

Similar charges of a breach of the Convention and also of the "public faith" occur in letters from Burgoyne to Heath of November 11 and 12, 1777. (*The Parliamentary Register*, XI, Appendix, vii and viii.) Finally, on November 14, Burgoyne wrote to Gates:

"While I state to you, Sir, this very unexpected treatment I entirely acquit M. Genl. Heath & every gentleman of the military department of any inattention to the publick faith engaged in the Convention. They do what they can; but while the supreme powers of the state are unable or unwilling to enforce their authority, & the inhabitants want the hospitality or indeed the common civilisation to assist us without it, the publick faith is broke, & we are the immediate sufferers." (*Papers of the Continental Congress*, Vol. 57, pp. 31-35, Library of Congress.)

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<sup>2</sup> For a well-documented description of the quartering controversy, see Batchelder, *Bits of Cambridge History*, Part I.

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Considering the behavior of George II in the Seven Years' War, it is not surprising that Congress was apprehensive that his successor would have no compunction in treating the Convention as void and sending Burgoyne's men back to the firing line the moment they were released. On December 18, 1777, Congress chose a committee, consisting of five of its ablest and most esteemed members, John Witherspoon of New Jersey (President of Princeton), William Duer of New York, Francis Dana of Massachusetts, Francis Lightfoot Lee of Virginia, and Jonathan Bayard Smith of Pennsylvania, to consider what action should be taken in the light of Burgoyne's recent letters.<sup>3</sup>

Historians who are so sure that Congress placed an indelible stain upon American honor, would do well to read the detailed and able report of this Committee, presented to Congress on December 27, 1777 (*Journals of the Continental Congress*, IX, 1059-63), ending with the following proposed resolutions:

*"Resolved*, That the charge made by Lieutenant General Burgoyne in his letter to Major General Gates, of the 14 November, of a breach of public faith on the part of these States is not warranted by any article of the Convention of Saratoga; That it betrays a disposition of availing himself of such declaration in order to disengage himself and the army under him

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<sup>3</sup>Dyer of Connecticut was the only one of the original members of the Second Continental Congress, assembled in May 1775, who was still in Congress. Some of the more conservative members had not been re-elected. Peyton Randolph of Virginia, the first president, Ward of Rhode Island and Lynch of South Carolina had died. Richard Henry Lee was sick; Franklin and John Adams were commissioners to France; Washington, Schuyler, Mifflin, and Sullivan were in the army; and Hancock, Samuel Adams, William Livingston, Patrick Henry, Henry Middleton, and several others were occupying important positions in the newly organized state governments.

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of the obligations they are under to these United States, and that the security which these States have hitherto had in his personal honor is hereby destroyed.

"2. *Resolved*, That Lieutenant General Burgoyne in not having ordered the cartouch boxes and several other articles of military accoutrements annexed to the persons of the non commissioned officers and privates in his army to be delivered up has not complied with the articles of Convention entered into betwixt him and General Gates on 16 October.<sup>4</sup>

"3. *Resolved*, That there is just ground of suspicion notwithstanding the declaration of Lieutenant General Burgoyne that all the standards and colours belonging to his army were not left in Canada previous to the march of the army from that province.<sup>5</sup>

"4. *Resolved*, Nevertheless, that the Congress of these United States will not avail themselves of any noncompliance with the articles of the Convention of Saratoga, which may hitherto have happened on the part of Lieutenant General Burgoyne, but that they will solemnly ratify the same and cause the prisoners surrendered by virtue of it to be released, whenever the King of Great Britain shall on his part cause his ratification of the said agreement to be properly notified to these States without availing himself of the unwarrantable charge of the breach of public faith, which has been alledged against these States by Lieutenant General Burgoyne."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Burgoyne claimed, unreasonably it would seem, that cartouch (cartridge) boxes were not included in the meaning of the word "arms," which, under the terms of the Convention, must be surrendered.

<sup>5</sup> Congress' suspicions on this point were justified. Some of the colors had not been left in Canada and, under the terms of the Convention, should have been surrendered. They were apparently concealed with the knowledge of General Riedesel, though not perhaps of Burgoyne. (See Stone, *Letters and Journals of Mrs. General Riedesel*, pp. 143-44, and Cannon, *Historical Record of the Ninth Foot*, p. 32.)

<sup>6</sup> The argument has been advanced by John Bigelow, Jr., in *American Historical Review*, XIII, 876, that Gates had no power to pledge Congress to release Burgoyne's troops for their return to England and that

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Congress adopted the Committee's recommendation, and on December 27, 1777, resolved that the embarkation of Burgoyne and his troops

"shall be suspended till a distinct and explicit ratification of the Convention shall be properly notified to these States by the court of Great Britain."

Further resolutions concerning the Convention and Burgoyne were adopted on January 2, 3, 8 and 12. On January 14, Henry Laurens, as president of Congress, transmitted copies of the proceedings to General Heath in Boston, who notified Burgoyne of Congress' decision. The King refrained from ratifying the Convention, possibly because the British Government feared that this might involve a recognition of the United States. When the British declined to pay longer for the upkeep of the troops, they were transferred by Congress to Charlottesville, Virginia, where food and fuel were more abundant than at Boston. Many of them deserted or died and the remainder were ultimately exchanged on the same basis as ordinary prisoners of war.

The facts set forth in the resolutions of Congress quoted above indicate that the members of Congress had substantial grounds for their action. But whether they did or not, the assertion that Washington indignantly remonstrated against the action taken, is nonsense.

The fiction of Washington's indignant remonstrance is presumably based on his letter to Richard Henry Lee of October 28, 1777, referring to England's breach of the

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therefore Congress was not blameworthy for having failed to release them. This argument seems overtechnical, and Congress itself did not try to defend its action on this ground.

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Convention of Klosterzeven and saying he was persuaded the British would not "hold better faith with us than they did with the French." In this letter he stated that he did not see how a breach by England "is to be prevented, without a direct violation of the articles ourselves, or, by attempting to guard against the evil, give them a plea of justification on theirs." But the most striking point in the letter is not the implied admonition against an American breach of the Saratoga Convention, but the prophecy that the British would not keep any better faith with the Americans than they had with the French in the Convention of Klosterzeven.<sup>7</sup>

British perfidy was stressed again in a letter from Washington to Congress of December 14, 1777, in which he said:

"While I am on the subject of Mr. Burgoyne and his Army, I would submit it to Congress, whether it will not be right and reasonable that all Expences, incurred on their Account for Provision &c. should be paid and satisfied, previous to their embarkation and departure. I mean, by an Actual deposit of the Money. Unless this is done, there will be little reason to suppose, that it will ever be paid. They have failed, that is the Nation, in other instances, as I have been told, after liquidating their Accounts and giving the fullest Certificates and we cannot expect that they will keep better faith with us, than with

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<sup>7</sup> Technically speaking, George II broke this Convention as King of Hanover rather than as King of England, but in doing so, he had the approval of his British Cabinet. The Duke of Newcastle wrote Lord Hardwicke on October 3, 1757, that he had given the King assurances that he would help him get out of the Convention and that these "assurances were repeated; and confirmed, in full strong a manner by Mr. Pitt." In a second letter to Hardwicke of the same date marked "Most Secret," Newcastle added: "If the King has not the common Power left of confirming, or rejecting, this Convention, by his Ratification, He must find out, some Other Way of doing it. Nil Mihi rescribas!" (British Museum; Add. MS. 32874 fol. 148 and 151.)

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Others. The payment too, I should apprehend, ought to be in Coin, as it will enable us to administer some relief to our unfortunate Officers and Men who are in Captivity."

If, as Washington asserted, there was "little reason to suppose" that the British nation would carry out the promises made by its military commanders in money matters, would it not, if given the chance, almost certainly yield to the far greater temptation to repudiate Burgoyne's agreement and keep his troops in America?

This letter, of Washington, laid before Congress and read on December 17 (*Journals*, IX, 1032), and his letter to Lee of October 28, were obviously better designed to suggest than to discourage a breach of the Convention.

Furthermore, when Washington was informed in a letter of January 5, 1778, from Henry Laurens, president of Congress, of the resolve to hold Burgoyne's troops until the King had ratified the Convention, he replied (January 9):

"I Yesterday Evening had the honor to receive your favor of the 5th. Inst. with its Inclosures. . . .

"The proceedings of Congress for the detention of Genl. Burgoyne and Army, or rather suspending their embarkation, till the convention of Saratoga is explicitly ratified and notified by the Court of Britain shall remain secret here, till they are duly announced by Congress. This procedure, when known to the General, will chagrine him much; For I learn by a Letter from Genl. Heath, that the refusal to let his troops embark at Rhode Island had given him some uneasiness."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Burgoyne had requested that he be permitted to embark his troops for England at Newport instead of at Boston, as called for by the Convention, but Congress quite properly voted, on December 1, 1777, to reject this request. Washington had anticipated this action by writing (November 13) to General Heath at Boston, directing him to insist on the transports being sent to Boston, because "Besides the delay which

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This is the only known expression of Washington's feelings concerning Congress' decision to suspend the embarkation of Burgoyne's troops, and historians who describe these words as an "indignant" remonstrance or protest must be singularly unfamiliar with what Washington was capable of doing with the English language when he wished to express indignation.

When some of the States sought to fill their quotas for the army by inducing the Convention soldiers to desert the British and enlist in the American army, Washington, as Trevelyan lyrically points out, "indignantly, and even passionately remonstrated" against this "ignoble expedient." (Trevelyan, *The American Revolution*, IV, 206.) But, as clearly appears from Washington's letter of March 17, 1778, to the Council of Massachusetts, cited and quoted by Trevelyan in support of his pronouncement, Washington's remonstrance was not on the ground that such enlistments would be a breach of the Saratoga Convention or otherwise "ignoble"; it was based solely on the ground that they would be dangerous. Washington said:

"It gives me inexpressible concern to have repeated information from the best Authority, that the Committees of the different Towns and districts in your State, hire deserters from Genl. Burgoyne's Army, and employ them as substitutes, to excuse the personal service of the Inhabitants. I need not enlarge upon the danger of substituting as Soldiers, men who have given a glaring proof of a treacherous disposition, and who are bound to us by no motives of attachment, to Citizens,

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will necessarily arise from confining them to Boston, as the place of departure, their Transports in a voyage round" (Cape Cod) "at this Season may probably suffer considerable injury and many of them may be blown as far as the West Indies."

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in whom the ties of Country, kindred, and some times property, are so many securities for their fidelity."

This is a sentiment to which the members of Congress would doubtless have said, Amen.

Recently discovered evidence proves that Washington and Congress had reason to fear that the British planned to violate the terms of the Convention. There had been a long standing controversy about an exchange of troops between Washington and Howe, because Washington, with the approval of Congress, had refused to deliver British prisoners, healthy and in a condition to rejoin the Army, in exchange for the half-starved American derelicts that Howe had released. The latter now proposed to settle the controversy his own way by ordering Burgoyne, his junior in rank, to violate the Convention and send the British (though not the German auxiliary) regiments to join Howe's army at New York. Howe's letter to Burgoyne, found in the British Headquarters Papers in the William L. Clements Library, reads:

"Secret

Philadelphia 16th Novr. 1777

"Dear Sir

"In consequence of the 3d. Article of your Convention with General Gates, whereby it is stipulated, that any Part of your Army may be exchanged, I am to beg you will be pleased to give your secret Directions to the commanding Officer of the Navy, convoying the Transports, who is instructed to follow your Orders for the Destination of the Troops, that, when they are embarked, he is to proceed with the British Artillery Men and Infantry to New York, my Design being to exchange the Officers for those of the Rebels in my Possession, and the Sol-



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diers for 2,200 Prisoners of the Enemy, that I sent in last Winter, in full Confidence of receiving an equal Number in Return, which, notwithstanding my repeated Applications, has been pointedly refused under the most frivolous Pretences. . . .

"The enclosed Letter for the Commanding Officer at York is to acquaint him with my Wishes for his Proceeding in the Exchange upon the Arrival of the Troops, and I request you will put it under your Cover to him, that the Officer, to whom you deliver it, may not suspect it came from me. I conceive it is necessary to use every possible Precaution to keep the Enemy ignorant of my Intentions, as on the least Suspicion the Troops wd. be infallably stopt— . . ." (Clark, *The Convention Troops and the Perfidy of Sir William Howe*, American Historical Review, Vol. 37, pp. 722-23.)

## CHAPTER XV

### WASHINGTON AND THE HISTORIANS

"Of all men in history, not one so answers our expectations as Washington. Into whatever part of his life the historian puts his probe, the result is always satisfactory." (Channing, *History of the United States*, 1924, II, 559.)

It is easy to understand the disposition of our earlier historians to puff up Washington at the expense of his less important colleagues. We had no heritage of great public men, other than great Englishmen, and it was essential for our national pride that we endow our first great national hero with the excellencies that would be attributed to several personages in a nation having a longer history. But to account for the persistence of this attitude in the historiography of the American Revolution is more difficult.

The earlier historians may have been misled by misplaced reliance on the integrity of the edition of Washington's writings, published in 1834-37 by the historian Jared Sparks, later president of Harvard. In his Introduction (*Writings of Washington*, II, xi) Sparks declared that "nothing has been passed over, which would serve to illustrate the character of Washington, or explain the transactions in which he took an important part." Yet far from fulfilling this assurance, Sparks, as will be seen from the following examples, again and again omitted passages which

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are vividly illustrative but throw unfavorable light on Washington's character or actions.

In each instance I shall *italicize the words or passage omitted by Sparks*, who, it should be borne in mind, gave no indication of the fact that he had made omissions or, as sometimes occurred, had substituted other words.

During the French and Indian War, Washington, in his capacity as colonel in command of the Virginia troops, wrote Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia on November 9, 1756:

"Indian goods are much wanted to reward the Catawbas, and encourage them to engage in our service. *In what manner are they to be paid for scalps? Are our soldiers entitled to the reward like indifferent people? It is a tedious and expensive way to defer payment until proved and sent to your Honor.*

"Your Honor and the Assembly should determine these points and many others very essential . . ."

In order to preserve their western land for settlers, by discouraging speculators, several of the Colonies, including Pennsylvania, granted only a relatively small tract of land to any one entrant. A further limitation was established by the British Government's Proclamation of 1763, protecting the frontier settlers against the horrors of Indian massacres (generally caused by the encroachment of the whites on Indian lands) by prohibiting land grants west of the Allegheny Mountains. With these rules in mind, Washington wrote his agent, William Crawford, on September 21, 1767:

"I am told the Land, or Surveyors Office" (for western Pennsylvania) "is kept at Carlyle, if so I am of Opinion that Colo. Armstrong (an Acquaintance of mine) has something to do in the management of it, and I am perswaded woud readily serve

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me . . . It is possible (but I do not know that it really is the case) that Pennsylvania Customs will not admit so large a quantity of Land as I require, to be entered together if so this may *possibly be evaded*<sup>1</sup> by making several Entries to the same amount if the expence of doing which is not too heavy; but this I only drop as a hint leaving the whole to your discretion and good management. . . .

*"The other matter, just now hinted at and which I proposed in my last to join you in attempting to secure some of the most valuable Lands in the King's part which I think may be accomplished after a while notwithstanding the Proclamation . . .*

*"I would recommend it to you to keep this whole matter a profound Secret . . . it might give the alarm to others and by putting them upon a Plan of the same nature (before we could lay a proper foundation for success ourselves) set the different Interests a clashing and probably in the end overturn the whole all which may be avoided by a Silent management and the"* (word omitted by Washington) *"smugly carried on by you under the pretence*<sup>1a</sup> *of hunting other Game which you may I presume effectually do at the same time you are in pursuit of Land."*

In 1775 Washington was, as we have seen, recklessly writing derogatory letters about his New England officers and men. On August 29, 1775, he wrote Richard Henry Lee:

*"it is among the most difficult tasks I ever undertook in my life to induce these people to believe that there is, or can be, danger till the Bayonet is pushed at their Breasts; not that it proceeds from any uncommon prowess, but rather from an unaccountable kind of stupidity in the lower class of these people which, believe me, prevails but too generally among the officers of*

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<sup>1</sup> Sparks substituted here "perhaps be arranged."

<sup>1a</sup> Sparks substituted "guise."

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*the Massachusetts part of the Army who are nearly of the same kidney with the Privates, . . .*

Sparks printed most of the letter, but not this part of it.

Prior to Washington's coming to Philadelphia as President in 1789, Pennsylvania had provided for the gradual abolition of slavery. Apprehensive that this emancipation statute<sup>2</sup> might operate to give freedom to the household slaves he had brought with him from Virginia, Washington wrote, on April 12, 1791, to his secretary, Tobias Lear:

*"you will take the best advise you can on the subject, and in case it shall be found that any of my Slaves may, or any for them shall attempt their freedom at the expiration of six months, it is my wish and desire that you would send the whole, or such part of them as Mrs. Washington may not chuse to keep, home . . . I wish to have it accomplished under pretext that may deceive both them and the Public;—and none I think would so effectually do this, as Mrs. Washington coming to Virginia next month (towards the middle or latter end of it, as she seemed to have a wish to do) if she can accomplish it by any convenient and agreeable means, with the assistance of the Stage Horses &c. This would naturally bring her maid and Austin—and Hercules under the idea of coming home to Cook whilst we remained there, might be sent on in the Stage."* (Eyre, *Letters and Recollections of George Washington*, 38.)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This statute (Act of March 1, 1780; *Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*, X, 71) provided that slaves owned by non-residents (with certain exceptions none of which applied to Washington) could not be "retained in this state longer than six months."

<sup>3</sup> I think it fair to assume that Sparks was familiar with this letter when he published his *Writings of Washington*, because in the Introduction to her book Mrs. Louisa Lear Eyre quotes the following note to her from Sparks: "The letters to Mr. Tobias Lear contained in this volume were copied from the originals written by Washington. The volume was furnished to me, while I was preparing Washington's Writings for the press, by Mr. Lincoln Lear, and I now present it to his daughter, Miss

In giving these examples, I do not mean to imply that the omitted passages prove that Washington was a wicked man. They obviously prove no such thing. But they do, I think, tend to show that he was not the paragon of humaneness, magnanimity, and honesty that Sparks and his followers have portrayed him to be. I likewise do not mean to deride Sparks, who was bold in comparison with Mason Weems, John Marshall, and Washington Irving, the Washington biographers of the period. It took courage in Sparks' day to publish even a bowdlerized version of the letter to Crawford quoted above, and even more to publish, as he did, without any emendation whatsoever, a letter from Washington to Crawford of September 25, 1773, encouraging him to make false entries for public lands in the Kentucky country on their joint behalf.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, Sparks' tampering with the source material was apparently not the principal cause of the historians' failure to present a true picture of Washington, because even after the publication of Ford's more reliable edition of Washington's writings, the portrayals of Washington's

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Louisa Lear." A number of the letters in this collection were published by Sparks. He may, of course, have excluded this particular letter, as he did hundreds of others, solely because he thought it less important than those which he chose to publish.

<sup>4</sup> Washington wrote: "Old David Wilper . . . tells me, that they have already discovered four salt springs" (as much coveted then as oil fields are today) "in that country . . . I wish I could establish one of my surveys there; I would immediately turn it to an extensive public benefit, as well as private advantage. However, as four are already discovered, it is more than probable there are many others, and if you could come at the knowledge of them by means of the Indians, or otherwise, I would join you in taking them up in the name or names of some persons, who have a right under the proclamation, and whose right we can be sure of buying, as it seems there is no other method of having lands granted; but this should be done with a good deal of circumspection and caution, till patents are obtained." (Sparks, *Writings of Washington*, II, 377.)

character continued to be as misleading as before. This, I believe, is attributable largely to the propensity of the biographer or historian to accept his principal character's own favorable view of himself, as set forth in his letters or memoirs, as a correct statement of the facts. This propensity was recognized by Tolstoy, who, in rejecting the traditional historical accounts of Napoleon's invasion of Russia, said:

"All that strange contradiction, now difficult to understand, between the facts and the historical accounts, only arises because the historians dealing with the matter have written the history of the beautiful words and sentiments of the various generals, and not the history of the events." (*War and Peace*, Maude's translation, III, 342.)

Like the French and Russian generals of a later generation, Washington was a writer of "beautiful words and sentiments." In his letter to Richard Henry Lee about Conway, whom he obviously despises (page 45), he tells Lee: "You may believe me, my good Sir, that I have no Earthly views, but the public good, in what I have said. I have no prejudice against General Conway." In his preposterous explanation to Gates of his curt letter to Conway (page 60) he declares that "with an openness and candour which I hope will ever characterize and mark my conduct have I complied with your request." In his letter to the historian Gordon, unjustly casting on Greene the final responsibility for the loss of Fort Washington (page 138), he chivalrously records that he has no desire "to exculpate myself from any censure . . . by charging another."

I don't believe that Washington consciously lied; I think he convinced himself of the truth of what he wanted to

believe. But whatever his mental processes, he has been highly successful in persuading the historians to accept his version of the facts in the teeth of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Fort Washington, the Conway Cabal, long-term enlistments are examples in point. But perhaps the most striking is in connection with the unsuccessful French expedition to Virginia in March, 1781.

On January 4, 1781, Benedict Arnold, who had been given a commission as brigadier-general in the British army as part of the reward for his treason, landed with a detachment of 1,600 men at Westover, Virginia, and began a series of devastating raids. Washington, a considerable part of whose regular troops had recently mutinied, was in no position to render effective aid. Consequently the state of Virginia and Congress, through the French minister, La Luzerne, asked that a detachment from the French fleet stationed at Newport, Rhode Island, under acting Admiral Destouches, be sent against Arnold.<sup>5</sup>

On February 3, 1781, General Rochambeau, commander-in-chief of the French army in America, wrote Washington from Newport:

"I send Your Excellency a copy of the report of the naval officer who has seen and reported, from Plum Island, the true condition of the English fleet. I am about to see the admiral to find out if he proposes to go out with his whole fleet or at least to send several vessels for Chesapeake Bay. It is rather generally considered to be very dangerous to attempt to bring a broadside to bear in a bay, the mouth of which is much narrower than is marked on the maps, but I think two ships of the line and two frigates should suffice to destroy Arnold's entire

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<sup>5</sup> This latter fact appears from a letter from Rochambeau to Washington of February 20, 1781 (Doniol, V, 417).



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naval expedition in Chesapeake Bay and that we have a beautiful chance to strike at him at this moment." (French original in Doniol, V, 410.)

Rochambeau's letter and the enclosed report of the French naval officer were delivered to Washington on the 14th.<sup>6</sup> He replied on the 15th, urging that the entire French fleet and part of Rochambeau's troops be sent to Virginia. But in the meantime, on February 9, Destouches had sent to Virginia a detachment of a ship-of-the-line and two frigates under Captain de Tilly.<sup>7</sup> This weakening of the French fleet made Washington's proposal of the 15th temporarily impractical and Destouches informed Washington of this in a letter dated the 20th. (Papers of George Washington, Vol. 166, Library of Congress.) Washington replied on the 26th:

"Under the information you have received and from the applications made to you, you had a right to expect that the detachment sent into the bay would fully answer the end, and the readiness with which you embraced the opportunity for sending it has a just claim to our acknowledgements."

This letter was crossed by a letter of the 25th from Rochambeau to Washington advising him that de Tilly had returned on February 24, and that Destouches had decided to make a second attempt with his whole fleet and a large military force. (Doniol, V, 422-23.) Thrilled by the good news, Washington set out for Newport immediately for a

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<sup>6</sup> Washington's headquarters were at New Windsor on the Hudson near West Point, and letters from him to the French commanders at Newport, or vice versa, took from three to upward of ten days for delivery.

<sup>7</sup> Washington was at first hopeful that this detachment would be sufficient to relieve Virginia, as appears from a letter of February 21 from him to Governor Thomas Jefferson of Virginia.

## WASHINGTON AND THE HISTORIANS

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conference concerning the projected expedition, sending ahead the following note of March 2 to Rochambeau:

"The important and agreeable intelligence, . . . determined me to lose no time in setting out to enjoy the satisfaction which I have been so long promising myself. I hope to arrive at New Port, early on tuesday, in time to have a conversation with Your Excellency and the Chevalier Des touches previous to the departure of the fleet."

He wrote Destouches at the same time:

"I had the honor of receiving your dispatch by the Baron De Coleson the third day after its date, informing me of the resolution you had taken of renewing the attempt in Chesapeak bay with your whole fleet. Persuaded that this determination is warranted by prudence as well as a spirit of enterprise, I receive the intelligence with peculiar pleasure."

Washington arrived at Newport on the 6th (Claude Blanchard, *Journal*, p. 93), and on the 8th the whole French fleet and a body of French troops left for Virginia. (Washington to La Luzerne, March 8, 1781.)

It will be seen from the foregoing that the essential facts in this exchange of correspondence between Washington and the French commanders were these. On February 3, 1781, Rochambeau wrote Washington that the French fleet had a temporary superiority over the British. Washington replied on the 15th urging that the whole French fleet, accompanied by a military force, be sent to Virginia. In the meantime, however, Destouches had detached three vessels from the French fleet, thereby temporarily restoring the British fleet's superiority and making it impracticable for the French to send out their fleet until the detachment had returned. The situation was promptly explained to Wash-

ington by Destouches (February 20) upon receipt of Washington's letter of the 15th. When the French detachment returned, the French advised Washington (February 25) that they were now prepared to act on his recommendation. Washington delightedly hastened to Newport to confer with them concerning the proposed expedition, and on March 8, two days after his arrival, the entire French fleet and the accompanying troops set sail for Virginia.

The British intelligence service brought Admiral Arbuthnot prompt notice of the French sailing, and on March 10 he left New York to intercept Destouches. Days of acute anxiety for Rochambeau and Washington followed. Rivington's New York *Royal Gazette* for March 17, 1781, of which Washington soon received a copy (Washington to Rochambeau, March 21) published figures showing a slight superiority for the British fleet in number of vessels and guns, announced that the British were reported on the heels of the French, and predicted that:

"this sudden appearance of the British fleet will in all probability frustrate the whole intention" (of Washington and the French) "and may, in one great day of decision, enable our brave Admiral to rank in the center of his triumphant predecessors, Howard, Blake, Russell, and Boscawen."

Furthermore, as if to confirm the fulfillment of this dire prediction, Washington received word on March 21 from Lafayette in Virginia, written on the 15th, saying that no sign of the French fleet had yet been seen. (Washington to Rochambeau, March 21.)<sup>8-9</sup>

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<sup>8-9</sup> Word as to the fate of Destouches' fleet—which was that the English had driven it away from the Chesapeake, but without serious loss—did not reach Washington until March 30 (Washington to Rochambeau,

## WASHINGTON AND THE HISTORIANS

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At this critical juncture, Washington sent out a series of letters to correspondents in various states indicating that the French had got themselves into a bad hole because they had rejected his advice. He wrote Schuyler of New York on March 23, 1781:

"We are in a most critical and disagreeable state of suspense with respect to the two Fleets. Neither had arrived within Chesapeak bay the 15th. Instt. when letters from the Marqs. and Baron de Steuben were dated at Yorktown (20 Miles from the Mouth of James River) tho' both were expected.

*"Private*

"How unhappy it is for all our measures, that the adoption of them cannot be in season Had the French Commrs. at R Island complied (in the first instance) with my request to send the whole Fleet, and a detachmt. from their Land force to Virga. the destruction of Arnolds Corps must have been compleat during the debilitated state of the British Fleet. The undertaking now, is bold and precarious, rendered more so by an unfortunate and to me unaccountable delay of 24 hours in their quitting Newport, after it was said they were ready to Sail; the Wind being as favorable to them and as adverse to the Enemy as Heaven cd. furnish. But it is our true policy to make the most of their assistance without censuring their mistakes therefore it is I communicate this in confidence."

On March 28, he wrote Lund Washington:

"We have heard nothing certain of the two fleets since they left their respective ports. We wait with impatient anxiety for advices from Chesapeak, and the southern army. God send

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March 31, 1781). When writing Jefferson earlier in the day of March 21, before receiving Lafayette's alarming message, Washington still expected "the happiest consequences" from the French-American joint operation.

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they may be favourable to us. A detachment from New-York has made two or three attempts to put to sea (for the purpose, it is said, of reinforcing either Arnold or Cornwallis) and as often returned. My last accounts from New-York mention another attempt on the 25th, but whether with truth, or not, it is not in my power to say. It was unfortunate—but this I mention in confidence—that the French fleet and detachment did not undertake the enterprize they are now upon, when I first proposed it to them. The destruction of Arnold's corps would then have been inevitable before the British fleet could have been in a condition to put to sea. Instead of this the small squadron, which took the *Romulus* and other vessels, was sent, and could not, as I foretold, do any thing without a land force at Portsmouth." (Rivington's *Royal Gazette*, April 4, 1781, p. 3.)

And between March 23 and 28 he sent letters containing similar passages to Joseph Jones of Virginia (March 24), William Fitzhugh of Maryland (March 25), and General John Armstrong of Pennsylvania (March 26). These are quoted in the Appendix to this chapter.

Unless the truth should leak out, these letters would, of course, tend not only to protect Washington against criticism if the expedition ended in failure or disaster but would give an impression of superior foresight no matter what the fortune of the expedition might prove to be. Schuyler was immensely impressed, as is shown by his answer to Washington (April 3, 1781) in which he says:

"I most sincerely lament that a plan so judiciously formed as that you mention in confidence, should be defeated by those who would have reaped so much credit from the success which would, in all human probability, have ensued, and the glory of having rendered so essential a service to the allied

powers. . . . But I trust the day is rapidly advancing, when an astonished world will know what it would be improper to communicate now, and feel what they ought, an increase of gratitude, that best affection of the human heart." (Sparks, *Correspondence of the American Revolution*, III, 281.)

When Washington wrote these letters, he knew, or had most conveniently forgotten, that his recommendation that a French fleet and military expedition be sent to Virginia had not been made until after the French detachment had been sent out under de Tilly; that the French were not in a position to adopt his recommendation until after the detachment's return; and that when Destouches later proposed sending the entire fleet, he (Washington) far from indicating that he now thought the expedition "precarious," expressed his "peculiar pleasure" at the proposal and hurried to Newport to co-operate.

The letters were demonstrably untrue, and if any one of them should come to the knowledge of the French, Washington would inevitably be placed in an exquisitely embarrassing predicament. Worse still, French good will, which was of such vital importance to the American cause, would be jeopardized. Washington himself wrote John Laurens on April 9, 1781:

"if France delays, a timely, and powerful aid in the critical posture of our affairs it will avail us nothing should she attempt it hereafter; . . . we are at the end of our tether, and . . . now or never our deliverance must come."

Unhappily the letter to Lund Washington was intercepted by the British, and published in the April 4, 1781, issue of Rivington's *New York Royal Gazette*. A copy of it fell into the hands of Rochambeau, who, on April 26,

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wrote Washington a letter printed in the Appendix to this chapter. He quoted the published letter, and called attention to its misstatements.

Washington replied on April 30:

"I assure your Excellency, that I feel extreme pain at the occasion of that part of your letter of the 26th. Inst. which relates to an intercepted letter of mine published by the enemy. I am unhappy, that an accident should have put it in their power to give to the world any thing from me, which may contain an implication the least disagreeable to you or to the Chevalier Des-Touches. I assure you sincerely, that I have no copy of the original letter in my possession, so that I am unable by a comparison to determine how far the publication may be just. The enemy have fabricated whole letters for me, and even a series of letters; and it is not improbable they may have given a different turn to some of my expressions in the present instance.<sup>10</sup> It would however be disingenuous in me not to acknowledge that I believe the general import to be true. The copy however which Your Excellency has sent me differs in some respects from that which the enemy has published, as you will perceive by the inclosed Gazette.<sup>11</sup> Whatever construction it may bear, I beg your Excellency will consider the letter as to a private friend, a Gentleman who has the direction of my concerns at home, totally unconnected with public affairs, and on whose discretion I could absolutely rely. No idea of the same kind has ever gone to any public body.

"When I say that I believe the general import of the publi-

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<sup>10</sup> Washington's intimation that the *Gazette* had not improbably given a different turn to some of his expressions is not borne out by the facts. The letter was accurately reproduced, as can be seen by comparing the copy from the *Gazette* appearing earlier in this chapter with the copy of the original letter published in *Writings of Washington*, XXI, 385-86.

<sup>11</sup> The differences were trivial, as will be seen by comparing the letter quoted earlier in this chapter, with Rochambeau's version printed in the Appendix to this chapter.

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cation to be true, I mean it in this sense, that there did appear to me a degree of delay in executing the enterprise, suggested by me, with the causes of which I was not well apprised; and an idea of this kind was, probably, expressed in my letter to Mr. Washington. As to the apparent insinuation that the first expedition had been preferred to the one proposed by me, I could not have intended to convey it in its fullest latitude, because it would have been unjust. I could not but have recollected that my *formal* proposal<sup>12</sup> did not reach you till after the departure of the first Squadron. My letter however was written in haste, and might have been inaccurately expressed.

"I have lately learnt (though not officially) that the cause of the delay I have alluded to was a want of Supplies for the Fleet.<sup>13</sup> Impressed with a real esteem for, and confidence in the Chevalier Des Touches, I heard this circumstance with satisfaction.

"With this explanation I leave the matter to his candor and to yours, and flatter myself it will make no impressions inconsistent with an intire perswasion of my sincere esteem and attachment."

By April 30, the French fleet had got back safely, though without achieving its objective of crippling Arnold. Rochambeau, having no occasion to press the point further, wrote Washington a gracious letter on May 5, saying that Destouches had not seen the tell-tale number of the *Gazette*, and that, if the Admiral should later stumble on it, he, Rochambeau, would doubtless be able to pacify him by showing him Washington's letter. (Doniol, V, 459.)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The groundlessness of this intimation that there had previously been an *informal* proposal of the extensive expedition later *formally* proposed is discussed in the Appendix to this chapter.

<sup>13</sup> According to Washington's letter to Schuyler of March 23, published earlier in this chapter, the delay was of "24 hours."

<sup>14</sup> Destouches perhaps never learned of the published letter, but Lafayette wrote Washington on April 15 (*Writings of Washington*, XXI,



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But, while this affair plays no further part in the history of the Revolution, one of the observations in Washington's final letter is worth noting as giving further evidence that his statements, like those of any other human being, must be checked against other available evidence if the truth is to be known. Washington, it will be noted, points out to Rochambeau that his earlier intercepted letter was "to a private friend . . . totally unconnected with public affairs." Now Lund Washington, it is true, was totally unconnected with public affairs, but this was *not* true of the others to whom similar letters had been written. Jones was a member of Congress from Virginia; Schuyler, a leading member of the New York Senate; Fitzhugh, a member and recently speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates; and Armstrong, major-general of the Pennsylvania militia. In short, Washington's letters in this wretched affair were, from first to last, untrue.

Most historians of the Revolution and biographers of Washington have ignored this interesting and illuminating incident. But Professor Sears, in his recent, highly praised<sup>18</sup> life of Washington, has a new approach. He mentions the incident, but, far from bringing out the labored evasiveness of Washington's letters, uses the one of April 30 to Rochambeau as the basis for a little homily on Washington's candor! He says:

"None too pleased with the coöperation so far afforded by

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491) that the letter had made a "Great Noise" in Philadelphia. This statement evoked a long reply from Washington (April 22, 1781) which is quoted in the Appendix to this chapter.

<sup>18</sup> For example, in a favorable review of this book in the July 1932 number of the *American Historical Review* (Vol. 37, p. 766), the reviewer points to no errors and declares, "Mr. Sears has been singularly successful in portraying the real Washington."

Rochambeau, or the efficiency of Destouches in the Chesapeake manoeuvre, Washington injudiciously confided his sentiments to Lund Washington, his manager at Mount Vernon. This letter which would scarcely have been penned at all by Washington at his best and wisest, fell unluckily into British hands. Here it was printed with great glee, with copies forwarded to the commanders under criticism.

"Washington's conduct in this most embarrassing circumstance vindicates his candor far better than any myth of cherry trees and axes. He offers the amend honorable with a frank admission that the letter was his own." (Sears, *Washington*, pp. 313-14.)

In referring at length to this incident and Sears' treatment of it, I do not mean to imply that his naïveté is characteristic of contemporary historians generally. On the contrary, I have the utmost respect for the insight, as well as the learning, of most of the historians working today in the field of eighteenth-century American history. Evarts B. Greene, Nevins and Commager of Columbia, Becker of Cornell, Morison and Schlesinger of Harvard, Gepson of Lehigh, Carter of Miami, Siebert of Ohio State, Corwin of Princeton, Troyer Anderson of Swarthmore, Andrews, Bemis and Labaree of Yale, and Allen French, not to mention a large group of younger historians including those who recently contributed to *The Era of the American Revolution*, have all written with great acumen. But they have dealt primarily with the background or special aspects of the American Revolution, not with Washington and the Revolution as a whole. When such men undertake this more comprehensive work, we shall have a clearer picture of the Revolution and its great leader.



## APPENDICES

### CHAPTER I

#### GATES AT CAMDEN

ON August 8, 1781, General Nathanael Greene, who superseded Gates after his defeat at Camden, wrote to an unidentified correspondent:

“Gen. Gates left this country under a heavy load; and I can assure you he did not deserve it. If he was to be blamed for any thing at all, it was for fighting, not for what he did, or did not do, in or after the action. I have been upon the ground where he was defeated, and think it was well chosen, and the troops properly drawn up; and had he halted after the defeat at Charlotte, without doing the least thing,<sup>1</sup> I am persuaded there would have been as little murmuring upon that occasion, as in any instance whatever, where the public meet with a misfortune of equal magnitude. I think the order of congress for an inquiry was premature, and am confident he will acquit himself with honor, whenever he is brought to trial. But if I could have my wish, he should be acquitted without an inquiry, unless he chose it himself.” (Gordon, *History*, 1788, IV, 98.)

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<sup>1</sup> Gates' long ride from the field of battle to Hillsborough, north of Charlotte, N.C., could hardly have been impelled, as imputed by Hamilton, by terror; he would obviously have been perfectly safe long before. He wrote that he sought to reach a point which could be best used as the basis for building up a new army of Virginia and North Carolina recruits. (Gates to Congress, August 20, 1780, Papers of the Continental Congress, No. 154, II, pp. 234-37, Library of Congress.)

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Greene was a good prophet. On August 14, 1782, John Rutledge, congressman from South Carolina, wrote Gates:

“Dear General,

The resolution of Congress, directing that an enquiry should be made into your conduct in the campaign of 1780, has this day been repealed by a vote of every state present (ten). The evidence before the Committee, which gave such unanimity to the vote, came from men the most honorable and the most capable of judging. General I. Huger, Gen. Stevens, Major T. Pinckney and Col. Marion etc. The first, third and fourth of these gentlemen shewed, that the movement made by you on Camden, was made on information given by them of the weak condition of that post—the certainty with which (had it not been most unexpectedly reinforced) it would have been taken, and the important consequences that would have followed to the army and the state, from the capture thereof. And farther, that the movement was not only a proper one, under the view already taken, but indispensable to the safety of Genl Caswell and the North Carolina militia, who had by some misdirection or want of judgment placed themselves in your front and in a position the most perilous. Of your order of march and battle, and your personal bearing in the action and endeavor to rally the flying militia, they speak in terms the most favorable. And lastly, that when the heads of the two armies met in the night and a prisoner gave information that Cornwallis was present with a large regular force, you called a Council of war and submitted the question—whether, thus advised, it would be proper to retreat? when neither Baron de Kalb, Gen. Smallwood, Gen. Caswell, Gen. Guest, or Gen. Stevens, advised to the measure, and that the latter, considered and declared the capture and the information given by the prisoner, as a *ruse* of Rawdon to escape an attack. To this statement I have but to add, that from the beginning of your suspension to the pres-

ent day, no charges against you have been exhibited nor has any person appeared as prosecutor or witness either to Congress, to Gen. Washington or to Gen. Greene." (Sparks' Papers, Harvard College Library.)

Gates resumed active service and was second in command of the American army when the Revolution ended in 1783.

## CHAPTER II

### GATES BRINGS REENFORCEMENTS TO WASHINGTON

DESPITE Carleton's failure to break through in the north, Washington's imprudent and disastrous attempt to hold Fort Washington near New York City in November 1776, discussed in detail in Chapter XIII, had put the American cause in a critical state.<sup>1</sup> The loss of Fort Washington was followed by the capture of great stores of supplies across the river at Fort Lee. Disheartened by these reverses, hundreds of the New Jersey militia made their peace with the British commanders, and most of those who did not, stayed at home. On December 18, Washington wrote the Massachusetts Legislature that he had not had "the least aid from the Militia, notwithstanding the earliest and most pressing Applications." Unable to make a single formidable stand, and driven from pillar to post across the entire state, he retreated beyond the Delaware into Pennsylvania on December 8, with "less than 3,000 Men fit for duty" (Washington

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<sup>1</sup> The British, realizing that New York was a more promising field for operations than Massachusetts and menaced by Washington's fortification of Dorchester Heights, evacuated Boston in March 1776. The British troops were moved temporarily to Halifax, Nova Scotia. By the time reenforcements arrived from Europe and the combined forces descended on New York (July 1776), Washington and his army were on hand to meet them there.

## GATES BRINGS REENFORCEMENTS

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to John Augustine Washington, December 18, 1776).<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately Gates had foreseen the possibility that aid might be called for from the south, and on November 15, wrote to Schuyler that he did not think Howe's activity on the lower Hudson signified that the British were planning "offensive Operations to the Northward"; on the contrary, in his opinion:

"If they are determined at all risques to push the War, depend upon it, Philadelphia is their Object. A large Body of Troops could not be too soon assembled upon the West side of the Delaware." (Gates Papers, The New York Historical Society.)

This view and the fact that provisions were low at Ticonderoga had led him to order eight Continental regiments to move towards "Albany, to be ready to be marched thence into winter quarters, or be at hand to succour the southern Army, as occasion might require" (Gates to Hancock, November 27, 1776; Force 5, III, 874-75). On November 27, Schuyler wrote Gates from Saratoga ordering that these regiments be sent immediately to Washington's relief and advising him that "as you are anxious to go with the troops,

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<sup>2</sup> In the course of his retreat, Washington, through his military secretary, Lieutenant-Colonel Robert H. Harrison of Maryland, wrote General Schuyler (November 20) informing him of the British invasion of New Jersey. (Force 5, III, 780.) Harrison wrote Schuyler again on November 26, requesting that he send Washington all the Pennsylvania and New Jersey troops "with all possible expedition." (Force 5, III, 854-55.) Most of these troops (those whose period of enlistment had expired) had been sent south under Generals St. Clair and Maxwell before Schuyler received the letter. (Schuyler to Gates, November 12, 1776; Force 5, III, 658.) See also *Washington Papers*, Series 2 (Correspondence with the Officers), Volume I. This chronological digest of military correspondence from 1775 to 1784 is invaluable.



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. . . embark with the last of them.”<sup>3</sup> (Force 5, III, 879.)

It needs little exercise of the imagination to picture how much these reenforcements meant to Washington, especially in strengthening the morale of his harried army. When, after a march over mountains and through “deep snow” (Gates to Washington, December 12, 1776; Force 5, III, 1190), the reenforcements were reported to be drawing near, Washington wrote Gates (December 14):

“Before this comes to hand, you will have heard of the melancholy situation of our Affairs. I do not mean now to detail our Misfortunes. With a handful of men, compared to the Enemy’s force, we have been pushed thro’ the Jerseys, without being able to make the smallest opposition and to pass the Delaware. Genl. Howe is now on the other side, and beyond all question means, if possible, to possess himself of Philadelphia. His Troops are extended from Penny Town to Burlington; the main body, from the best advices, at the former and within the Neighbourhood of Trenton. I wish it were in my power to tell you, that Appearances were much against him; At present I confess they are not. . . . I have heard that you are coming on

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<sup>3</sup> Gates had requested leave to go to Philadelphia where Congress was supposed to be in session. In June 1776, he had been appointed to an independent command over “the Troops of the United Colonies in Canada” (Washington to Gates, June 24, 1776). He maintained, with considerable logic, that the words “in Canada” were descriptive of the troops and therefore gave him independent command over them even after they were back across the border. Schuyler challenged this, and his position was sustained by Congress on July 8. Gates acquiesced and served under Schuyler faithfully throughout the 1776 campaign. His trip to Congress is said to have been for the purpose of securing a reversal of the ruling with respect to independent command. I have seen no evidence to support this assertion, but, even if it is true, there was nothing reprehensible in such a mission.

## GATES BRINGS REINFORCEMENTS

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with Seven Regiments,<sup>4</sup> this may have a happy effect, and let me entreat you, not to delay a moment in hastning to Pitts Town. . . . I am persuaded no Aid with you to give, will be withheld a single instant; your arrival may be a most happy Circumstance. The Congress have adjourned to Baltimore, but previously resolved that Philadelphia should be defended to the last extremity.”

He also wrote Governor Trumbull on the same date that Gates' regiments

“may in conjunction with my present Force and that under Genl. Lee, enable us to attempt a Stroke upon the Forces of the Enemy, who lay a good deal scattered and to all appearance in a state of Security. A lucky Blow in this Quarter, would be fatal to them, and would most certainly raise the Spirits of the People, which are quite sunk by our late misfortunes.”

The troops of Gates and Lee <sup>5</sup> arrived a few days before Christmas, and on December 26 Washington attacked and captured the Hessian outpost at Trenton. But far from the historians giving credit to Gates for helping to lay the foundation for this victory, he is mentioned, if at all, only to assert that he deserted Washington in the latter's time of need. Bancroft, for example, in his customary pontifical

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<sup>4</sup> Only four of the regiments, those of Stark, Poor, Reed, and Pater-son, consisting of about six hundred men, actually joined Washington's army. Washington ordered the other three, those of Bond, Porter, and Greateon, to take post at Morristown, New Jersey, and threaten Cornwallis' rear. (Washington to General William Maxwell of New Jersey, December 21, 1776.) One of the regiments originally designed for Washington—Bedel's of New Hampshire—was left behind, presumably because it was to be mustered out in New Hampshire on January 1, 1777, and would therefore have little or no time to serve.

<sup>5</sup> Lee—General Charles Lee—did not himself arrive, having been captured en route. General Sullivan brought the troops.

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manner, citing no authority for his damning statement, declares that:

"Gates was the first to fail, and, from wilful disobedience and want of hope and courage, turned his back on danger, duty, and honor. He disapproved of Washington's station above Trenton: the British would secretly construct boats, pass the Delaware in his rear, and take Philadelphia; so that he ought to retire to the south of the Susquehanna. Refusing the service asked of him, and eager to intrigue with congress at Baltimore, Gates, with Wilkinson, rode away." (Bancroft, IX, 228.)

In the absence of citations it is, of course, impossible to be sure what evidence, if any, Bancroft thought he had for these assertions. But I suspect it was a passage from Wilkinson's *Memoirs*. On pages 126 to 128 of the *Memoirs*, Wilkinson said:

"I however determined to abandon all thoughts of the ride to Philadelphia; but when I visited Newtown the next morning to take leave of General Gates, I was prevailed on to change my purpose, and we set out for the city the same day. On the road the General appeared much depressed in mind, and frequently expressed the opinion, that while General Washington was watching the enemy above Trenton, they would privately construct batteaux, pass the Delaware in his rear, and take possession of Philadelphia before he was aware of the movement; and that instead of vainly attempting to stop Sir William Howe at the Delaware, General Washington ought to retire to the south of the Susquehanna, and there form an army; he said it was his intention to propose this measure to Congress at Baltimore, and urged me to accompany him to that place. The proposition, after eighteen month's absence from home, was tempting, but my duty forbade the thought. . . . he" (Gates) "wrote a letter to the commander in chief, with which he

## GATES BRINGS REENFORCEMENTS

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charged me, and I took leave of him. . . . when I presented the letter of General Gates to him,<sup>6</sup> before receiving it, he exclaimed with solemnity, 'What a time is this to hand me letters!' I answered that I had been charged with it by General Gates. 'By General Gates! where is he?' 'I left him this morning in Philadelphia.' 'What was he doing there?' 'I understood him that he was on his way to Congress.' He earnestly repeated 'On his way to Congress!' then broke the seal, and I made my bow and joined General St. Clair on the bank of the river."

This story, if credible, would partly support Bancroft's charges, but, as brought out in Chapter X of this book, Wilkinson's reminiscences concerning Gates are worthless as evidence.

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<sup>6</sup> Washington was meticulous in keeping letters received by him in his official capacity. Consequently, the fact that no such letter from Gates has been found among the Washington papers indicates that none was sent. Nor is there any copy in the Gates papers.

## CHAPTER III

### GATES AND ARNOLD

WHEN Schuyler retired to Albany, on Gates' superseding him in command, his young aide-de-camp and friend, Major Henry Brockholst Livingston, and military secretary, Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Varick, remained with the army. From there they wrote him almost daily concerning Gates' alleged incapacity contrasted with the abilities of General Arnold, who had cultivated both these young malcontents and appointed Livingston one of his aides.

Commenting on the battle of Freeman's Farm, Varick wrote on September 22, 1777:

"Had Gates complied with Arnold's repeated desires, he would have obtained a general and complete victory over the enemy. But it is evident to me he never intended to fight Burgoyne until Arnold urged, begged and entreated him to do it." (Isaac Arnold, *Arnold*, 179.)<sup>1</sup>

On September 24, he wrote with evident relish:

"General Arnold is so much offended at the treatment Gates has given him, that I make not the least doubt the latter will be called on," (i.e., challenged to a duel) "as soon as the service will admit."

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<sup>1</sup> All subsequent letters from Varick and all letters from Livingston quoted in this chapter will be found on pages 179 to 185 of this same work.

And on the following day he again wrote, scoffing at Gates' cautiousness, and adding:

"I believe you are not much in the wrong in your conjectures that Gates was sure of success, and wished to ascribe all the honor to himself, as no other officer (except Arnold) had enough of a Gentleman's spirit to dispute it with him."

Major Livingston was equally abusive of Gates in his correspondence with his former chief. He wrote Schuyler on September 23:

"I am much distressed at General Arnold's determination to retire from the Army at this important crisis. His presence was never more necessary. . . . Believe me, Sir, to him alone is due the honor of our late Victory; whatever share his superiors may claim, they are entitled to none. . . . To-morrow he will set out for Albany. The reason of the present disagreement between two cronies is simply this: *Arnold is your friend*. I shall attend the General down, . . . I can no longer submit to the command of a man" (Gates) "whom I abhor from my very soul. His conduct is disgusting to every one, except his flatterers and dependants, among whom are some who profess to be your friends."

Gates was aware of Livingston's malevolence, as appears from the following letter of September 26 from Livingston to Schuyler:

"It has been several times insinuated by the Commander-in-Chief to General Arnold, that his mind has been poisoned and prejudiced by some of his family, and I have been pointed out as the person who had this undue influence over him. Arnold had always made proper replies on these occasions, and despised the reflection."

### CHAPTER III—APPENDIX

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And on September 22, Gates and Arnold quarreled openly over the latter's retention of Livingston. (Livingston to Schuyler; September 23, 1777; *Arnold*, pp. 180-81.) As will be later shown, Arnold requested and Gates granted him permission to give up his command and retire to Philadelphia. But Arnold continued to linger in camp, and Gates seems to have been willing to let bygones be bygones if he would disassociate himself from Livingston. This appears from the following passage in the letter of September 26 from Livingston to Schuyler, quoted above:

"another attempt has been made in a low, indirect manner, to have me turned from General Arnold's family. Major Chester (who, by the way, is an impertinent pedant) attempted to bring about a reconciliation. For this purpose he consulted with the Lieu't-Adj't-General, and in the course of their conversation was told that some overtures were necessary on Arnold's side; that General Gates was jealous" (suspicious) "of me, and thought I had influenced Arnold's conduct, and that of course it was necessary to get rid of me to open a way for accommodation."

But Arnold was defiant. Far from asking his aide to leave, he "insisted" (according to this same letter) that Livingston remain with him, lest otherwise "it should appear like a concession on his part," and

"desired Chester to return for answer: that his judgment had never been influenced by any man, and that he would *not sacrifice a friend* to please the 'Face of clay'."

A somewhat different version of the Gates-Arnold affair appears in the correspondence between the two principals, among the Gates Papers in the New York Historical Society. These are published (with a few unimportant differ-

ences) on pages 254-260 of Volume I of Wilkinson's *Memoirs*. The following letters are among these.

On September 22, 1777, immediately after the quarrel described in Livingston's letter to Schuyler of September 23, 1777, Arnold wrote Gates a long letter, in which he alleged that his commander had treated him badly in the following particulars: (1) Gates had placed him in a "ridiculous light" by transferring the New York militia from General Poor's brigade, which was in Arnold's division, to General Glover's brigade, which was in another division, without having previously notified Arnold of the proposed transfer and without thereafter clearing up the matter in general orders; (2) Gates, in reporting the successful engagement of September 19, 1777, to Congress, had mentioned the troops participating in the action "as a detachment from the army," whereas in fairness he ought to have pointed out specifically that it was mainly Arnold's division that had been in action; (3) Gates had just issued orders that Colonel Morgan's corps should make returns to and receive orders from headquarters directly rather than through Arnold, as had been the former practice; (4) Gates, when Arnold had mentioned these matters to him earlier in the day, had been "pleased to say . . . you did not know I was a Major-general or had any command in the army"; (5) Gates had recently paid little or no attention to any of his proposals, and had "huffed" him "in such a manner as must mortify a person with less pride than I have." Arnold closed by asking that, as soon as General Lincoln of Massachusetts arrived at headquarters, he, Arnold, be given a "pass to Philadelphia with my two aid-de-camps and their servants, where I propose to join General Washington."

The next day Arnold again wrote Gates as follows:



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"When I wrote you yesterday I thought myself entitled to an answer, and that you would at least have condescended to acquaint me with the reasons which have induced you to treat me with affront and indignity, in a public manner which I mentioned and which has been observed by many gentlemen of the army; I am conscious of none, but if I have been guilty of any crimes deserving such treatment, I wish to have them pointed out, that I may have an opportunity of vindicating my conduct. I know no reason for your conduct unless I have been traduced by some designing *villain*.

"I requested permission for myself and aids to go to Philadelphia, instead of which you have sent me a letter to the honourable John Hancock, esq. which I have returned. If you have any letters for that gentleman which you think proper to send sealed, I will take charge of them. I once more request your permission for myself and aids to pass to Philadelphia."

Gates answered these two letters on September 23 as follows:

"You wrote me nothing last night but what had been sufficiently altercated between us in the evening. I then gave you such answers to all your objections as I think were satisfactory. I know not what you mean by insult or indignity. I made you such replies only as I conceived proper. As to the open letter I sent you to Mr. Hancock, it was the civilest method I could devise of acquainting Congress with your leaving the army. And is to all intents and purposes as full a pass as can be desired. I sent it unsealed, as being the more complaisant to you, and is what is commonly done upon such occasions. That not being so agreeable to you as a common pass, I send you one inclosed."

General Lincoln arrived on September 29, but Arnold, as previously brought out in Livingston's letters to Schuyler,

lingered in camp and continued to write Gates sarcastic letters reminiscent of those of General Conway to Washington, quoted in Chapter VI of this book. Though without command, Arnold remained with the army until the engagement of October 7, in which, fighting valiantly as a volunteer, he was wounded. After recuperating in Albany he joined Washington's army, and, in June 1778, when the British evacuated Philadelphia, was given command of the city. There he remained until his transfer to West Point, a few months before the discovery of his treason in September 1780.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONWAY'S LETTER TO SULLIVAN

THE letter from Conway to Sullivan of January 3, 1778, referred to in the body of Chapter VI is in the Revolution Collection, Library of Congress, and is published in full in the *Sullivan Papers*, II, 2-3. The letter is in part as follows:

"*Dr General* in case I should not have the pleasure of Writing you this Day I think it necessary to write a few Lines on the subject you mentioned to me yesterday. I believe you and several others have heard me more than once mention the only condition that I made with . . .<sup>1</sup> he invited me and I can say pressed me to come over to this continent—this condition was that no french officer inferior in rank to me in france should be putt over me in america—this condition was broke through in regard of M<sup>r</sup> De Barr—I remonstrated against it but continued to serve. I remonstrated against M<sup>r</sup> De Kalbs promotion in the Latter end of september and still continued to serve when M<sup>r</sup> De Kalb came over in November to be the commander of a Division I sent my resignation to congress and retir'd from the army, this I have Done not out of a punctilio nor out of jealousy but for the following reasons. I am the french officer in this continent most advanced in france. I depend upon my military promotion in rank for to increase my fortune and that of my family. I freely own to you that it was partly with a view of obtaining sooner the rank of Brigadier in the french army that I have Joined this. M<sup>r</sup> De Kalb . . . being my inferior in

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<sup>1</sup> Silas Deane was presumably implied.

## CONWAY'S LETTER TO SULLIVAN

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france as he certainly is, his promotion over me in the Latter end of a campaign During which I servd and in which he Did not serve would be attended with Disagreeable inferences in the french army, would endanger my rank, and perhaps make me Lose the fruit of thirty years service. this has been my reason which I already mention'd to you and have last month to a committee of congress."

## CHAPTER VII

### WRITINGS ON THE CONWAY CABAL

THE most extensive discussion of the Conway Cabal is in Wharton's *Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence*, I; the most discriminating in Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History*, VI. Detailed discussions also appear in Austin's *Gerry*, I; Bancroft's *History of the United States*, IX; Botta's *History of the War of the Independence*, II; Burnett's *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, III, Preface; Fitzpatrick's *George Washington Himself*; Goodman's *Rush*; Gordon's *History*, III; Gottschalk's *Lafayette Joins the American Army*; Hatch's *The Administration of the American Revolutionary Army*; Hughes' *Washington*, III; Irving's *Washington*, III; Nolan's *George Washington and the Town of Reading*; J. H. Smith's *Our Struggle for the Fourteenth Colony*, II; Sparks' *Writings of Washington*, V, Appendix 6; Trevelyan's *American Revolution*, IV; and Wells' *Samuel Adams*, II. In all cases the authors take the position that there was, in fact, a cabal against Washington in the winter of 1777-78.

The most interesting examples of the general acceptance by historians of the unsupported tradition in this matter are the biographical sketches in the *Dictionary of American Biography* of those who were supposed to be connected with the alleged Cabal. All but the biographer of Richard Henry Lee take for granted that the Cabal existed; Lee's

## WRITINGS ON THE CONWAY CABAL

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biographer does not mention the affair. The comments with respect to the others are as follows:

John Adams: "He was not involved in the Conway cabal against Washington."—Worthington C. Ford

Samuel Adams: "He was not, as charged by Hancock, implicated in the Conway Cabal."—Carl L. Becker

William Alexander (Lord Stirling): "In the succeeding melancholy winter at Valley Forge there occurred the Conway Cabal, in the exposure of which Stirling had a share."—Edmund K. Alden

Conway: "The conspirators in Congress seem at once to have taken cover. Though the conclave who desired the removal of Washington has gone down in history as the 'Conway Cabal,' Conway was probably not the prime mover in the conspiracy but simply the one who was caught."—Randolph G. Adams

James Craik (Washington's physician): "As a close friend Craik warned Washington of the 'Conway Cabal,' naming Gen. Mifflin as one of the party against him."—Archibald C. Malloch

Gates: "It is difficult to establish the fact that Gates actually shared in a conspiracy to secure Washington's position, but he knowingly let his friends in Congress do so."—Randolph G. Adams

Greene: "In the winter of 1777-78, a serious attempt was made in Congress to displace Washington in favor of Gates. . . . When the 'Conway Cabal' failed of its purpose, Greene" etc. —Randolph G. Adams

Lafayette: "He warned Washington of the Conway Cabal and urged him to protect himself."—Frank Monaghan

Henry Laurens: "In the Conway Cabal, he exposed some of the plotting and strongly supported Washington."—Robert G. Albion

John Laurens: "At Valley Forge he kept his father, then presi-

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- dent of Congress, informed of the movements of the conspirators involved in the Conway Cabal.”—Frank E. Ross
- Lovell: “What part he may have had in the actual formation of the plot known as the Conway Cabal is not definitely known, but that he fomented it with all the power that was in him, is sufficiently evidenced by his letters to Gates and other intimate correspondents.”—Edmund C. Burnett
- Mifflin: “Mifflin was deeply involved in the cabal to advance Horatio Gates over Washington.”—James H. Peeling
- Rush: “Washington’s defeats near Philadelphia, in addition to his own personal experiences, now led Rush to question the general’s ability; and caused him to be associated indirectly with the Conway Cabal.”—Richard H. Shryock
- Washington: “Valley Forge and the Conway Cabal were to follow these defeats and, at the time the states should have whole-heartedly supported Washington for their own preservation the intrigue to supplant him in command of the army reached its crisis.”—John C. Fitzpatrick
- Wilkinson: “Intrigue was his ruling passion, and hard drinking too often his nemesis. These provocative characteristics brought him into the Conway cabal against Washington and ultimately forced him to resign his multiple honors.”—Isaac J. Cox

The legend of the Conway Cabal is so alluring to the historians that H. W. Howard Knott, in his biographical sketch of William Duer in the *Dictionary*, repeats the romantic but discredited<sup>1</sup> tale (first appearing in Dunlap’s *History of the New Netherlands*, II, 133-34) that Duer heroically contributed to the defeat of the Cabal:

“His strong patriotism was signally displayed on the occasion of the Conway Cabal, when New York was temporarily de-

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<sup>1</sup> In Hughes’ *Washington*, III, 256.

prived of its vote because of Duer's serious illness. This gave Washington's opponents in Congress a majority, and they planned to nominate a committee to remove the General from his command at Valley Forge. Word was sent to Duer, and despite his physician's warning that he could only be taken to Congress at the imminent risk of his life, he ordered his litter to be prepared and was about to make the journey, when the faction, hearing of his intent, abandoned the project."

Trevelyan, IV, 307-09; Fiske, II, 32-45; and Botta, II, 63-67, give the most lurid pictures of the Cabal. Their fantastic accounts are so obviously drawn mainly from imagination that a detailed discussion of them would be superfluous, with the possible exception of the following assertions of Botta (II, 66):

"An universal outcry arose against the intriguers. Conway no longer durst show himself among the soldiers, who threatened to wreak their vengeance upon him. He repaired to York, in Pennsylvania, where at that time the congress resided. As to Samuel Adams, . . . even he thought it prudent . . . to keep aloof from the officers and soldiers, under the apprehension of injury from the effects of their fury."

The "outcry" against the supposed intriguers was not raised until January 1778. Conway, far from hiding from the soldiery, was in active army service in the northern department from February to May 1778, which covered the period when the outcry against him was at its height. Samuel Adams was absent from Pennsylvania, where the main army was stationed, from November 1777 to May 1778, in performance of his duties as secretary of the State of Massachusetts. There is not a shred of evidence that either Conway or he thought it prudent to keep aloof from any officers or soldiers.



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### CRITICISM OF WASHINGTON

On October 26, 1777, John Adams wrote his wife:

"Congress will appoint a thanksgiving;" (for Gates' victory over Burgoyne) "and one cause of it ought to be that the glory of turning the tide of arms is not immediately due to the Commander-in-chief nor to southern troops. If it had been, idolatry and adulation would have been unbounded; so excessive as to endanger our liberties, for what I know. Now, we can allow a certain citizen to be wise, virtuous, and good, without thinking him a deity or a savior."<sup>2</sup> (Adams, *Familiar Letters*, pp. 322-23.)

On November 4, Congressman Thomas Burke of North Carolina wrote Governor Caswell of his home state:

"Upon the whole, it appears our miscarriage" (at Germantown) "sprung from the usual source—want of abilities in our superior officers and want of order and discipline in our army."

And on January 1, 1778, Samuel Adams wrote Richard Henry Lee:

"Our military Affairs in the middle Department are in such

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<sup>2</sup> It is unfair, however, to maintain, as many historians have done, that John Adams was persistently hostile to Washington. His frequently quoted remark, "I am sick of Fabian systems in all quarters," applied primarily to Gates, not to Washington, as indicated by the fact that it immediately follows the sentence, "I wish Stark" (who had just attacked the British at Bennington, while Gates, commander-in-chief of the northern army, was still acting on the defensive) "had the supreme command in the northern department." (John Adams to Mrs. Adams, September 2, 1777; Adams, *Familiar Letters*, p. 305.) Furthermore, only the day before, he had written Mrs. Adams in glowing terms of the fine example set by Washington in the matter of his simple mode of living. (*Familiar Letters*, p. 304.) To pursue the course of reasoning adopted by the exponents of the Conway Cabal, Adams' letter of September 2 would show that he was plotting to have *Gates* ousted from *his* command.

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a Situation as to afford us too much Reason to be chagrind. We have indeed sufferd no shameful Defeats, but a promising Campaign has however ended ingloriously. To what are we to attribute it? I believe to a miserable Set of General Officers. I mean to make some Exceptions. . . . Is there not Reason to fear that our Commander in Chief may one day suffer in his own Character by Means of these worthless Creatures?" (*Writings of Samuel Adams*, IV, 1-2.)

The most persistent critic of Washington during this period was James Lovell. The latter, who was a teacher in Boston at the outbreak of the Revolution, had been sent to Halifax as a prisoner by the British for his alleged activities as an American spy, but was exchanged in the autumn of 1776. The Massachusetts legislature promptly elected him to Congress where he became outstanding for industry and ability.<sup>3</sup> From the time of the battle of Brandywine, in which his son James, Jr., was wounded, his letters show an extremely critical attitude toward Washington.

On September 17, 1777, Lovell wrote William Whipple of New Hampshire:

"As to the affair at Brandywine, last Thursday, I doubt whether you will ever actually know whether Fortune alone is to be blamed, or whether Sullivan and the Chief should not share with her in the Slandering murmurs. Knowledge of the En-

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<sup>3</sup> Along with the Adamses, Lees and Harrisons, the Lovells have been one of the few American families to breed men of distinction, in the direct male line, generation after generation. Lovell's father John was the distinguished head of the Boston Latin School and his son James, Jr., after graduating from Harvard in 1776 at the age of 18, had a fine record as an officer in the Revolution. The latter's son Joseph, surgeon-general of the American army for many years, contributed to the foundation of the United States Weather Bureau and to Beaumont's epoch-making studies in gastric physiology, and Joseph's son, Mansfield, was a well-known Confederate general and civil engineer.

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emy's intentions on the Right Wing of our Army was certainly wanting."

On November 5, as pointed out in Chapter III, footnote 9, he wrote Gates that Washington had stripped Putnam of indispensable troops, and on November 21, he wrote Whipple:

"I have reason to think the battle of Germantown was *the* day of salvation offered by Heaven to us, and that such another is not to be looked for in ten campaigns." (Winsor, *Narrative and Critical History*, VI, 422.)

Three of Lovell's later letters show even greater asperity. On November 27, 1777, he wrote Gates:

"We want you in different places, but most of all in a third which you are not called to balance about. We want you most near Germantown.<sup>4</sup> Good God! what a situation are we in! how different from what might have been justly expected! You will be astonished when you come to know accurately what numbers have at one time and another been collected near Philadelphia to wear out stockings, shoes, and breeches. Depend upon it for every ten soldiers placed under the command of our Fabius, five recruits will be wanted annually during the war. The brave fellows at Fort Mifflin and Red Bank have despaired of succor and been obliged to quit. The naval department has fallen into circumstances of seeming disgrace. Come to the Board of War if only for a short season. . . . Upon a motion made some time ago, General Schuyler is *permitted* to tarry and look after his private affairs, and St.

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<sup>4</sup> Burnett states that the assertion "We want you most near Germantown" was an indirect way of saying, "We" (some group for whom Lovell was speaking) "want you to supplant Washington" (Burnett, *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, II, 570, footnote), but the grounds, if any, for this statement are not given.

Clair is *permitted* to do the same upon *seeing his name* in a council of war at what is generally by the inconsiderate, called the *grand army*. Since our resolve was forwarded, I see Kalb, Knox, and St. Clair, are a council reporting for the evacuation of Red Bank as incapable of bearing a siege.

"Such kind of counsel seems to be the relish of this quarter.

"I expect you will judge me to be in a very sour humor. I am so. For if it was not for the defeat of Burgoyne, and the strong appearances of an European war, our affairs are Fabiused into a very disagreeable posture. Poor McDougal lays at the point of death. Conway has resigned,<sup>4a</sup> and many spirited officers are discouraged by an overbalance of languid counsellors. There has indeed appeared a little stroke of discipline in the dismissal of Stephens and a number of inferior culprits from the service of the States. I wish this may have a suitable effect upon cowards, thieves, and drunkards, for such are the crimes which have caused the dismissions above mentioned." (Greene, *Greene*, II, 7-8.)

On December 20, 1777, he wrote Samuel Adams:

"You will find in some of my attendant slovenly scrawls so much encouragement to expect from me Intelligence about our *grand Army* upon the Return of the Committee, that I do not know how to avoid saying something about it, now, though 'tis a Subject very sickening to even a strong Stomach."

And, on January 20, 1778, he again wrote Adams:

"You could not expect more smartness in a Resolve which was meant to rap a Demi G— over the Knuckles than what

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<sup>4a</sup> Six days after receiving Washington's curt letter of November 9, 1777, Conway wrote Congress asking leave to resign (*Journals*, IX, 958). But, as far as appears, this request was not acted upon by Congress, and on December 13, 1777, he was appointed Inspector-General.

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you found in the one hinted at.”<sup>5</sup> “What a fatality attends some men in the choice of their favorites! It seems as if honest men are not to be found in the 13 United States sufficient to make Aids de Camp Secretaries and privy Councillors to one great Man whom no Citizen *shall* dare even to talk about, say the Gentlemen of the Blade.”

Lovell's own attitude is also perhaps reflected in the following extreme remarks of Jonathan Dickson Sergeant, attorney-general of Pennsylvania and a former member of Congress from New Jersey, who wrote Lovell on November 20:

“Thousands of Lives and millions of Property are yearly sacrificed to the insufficiency of our Commander-in-Chief. Two battles he has lost for us by two such Blunders as might have disgraced a Soldier of three months standing, and yet we are so attached to this Man that I fear we shall rather sink with him than throw him off our Shoulders.” (Samuel Adams Papers, New York Public Library.)

Yet even Lovell's strictures were apparently directed more against Washington's colleagues than against him individually, as will be seen from the following letter of December 28, 1777, from Lovell to Richard Henry Lee:

“I shall leave you to get news at large, respecting our army, and the transactions of Congress, from your worthy brother, only saying as to the first, that the extremity of these injuries, which were prophesied some months ago, are now realized in the commissariate; and that we, also, now find most of our

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<sup>5</sup> Possibly that of December 10, 1777, in which Congress resolved that: “General Washington be informed, that Congress have observed, with deep concern, that the principal supplies for the army under his command have, since the loss of Philadelphia, been drawn from distant quarters, whereby great expence has accrued to the public, . . .”

## CRITICISM OF WASHINGTON

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high expectations from the expensive establishment of the quartermaster, had not a thorough foundation; General Washington has made this evident, and shown it fairly to be the clue to unravel our many seemingly mysterious, past miscarriages, in the field." (Lee, *Memoir of the Life of Richard Henry Lee*, II, 150.)

To complete the records, I give the following additional contemporary criticism of Washington. Elias Boudinot of New Jersey, commissary-general of prisoners, wrote his brother Elisha on September 23, 1777:

"After marching and countermarching and forced marching, we have lain still at this place and peaceably suffered about 7500 men of the Enemy to cross the Schuylkill and enter the City of Philadelphia and never fired a Gun at them. Many are the reasons given for this Conduct, and it is all to turn out to their entire destruction, but I confess it is all arabic to me and by no means satisfactory." (Em. B., New York Public Library.)

And Colonel Daniel Brodhead of Pennsylvania wrote Gates on November 7, 1777:

"Since you left us our Division has suffered greatly and that chiefly by the conduct of Gen'l W—n. Most of the officers are unhappy under his command." (Nolan, *George Washington and the Town of Reading*, p. 68.)

Steuben has been portrayed as a firm supporter of Washington. Yet, though he does not criticize Washington directly, one of the most severe criticisms on record of Washington as a military commander is implied in a memorandum in Steuben's handwriting in Volume XI of the Steuben Papers at the New York Historical Society, describing the alleged conditions in Washington's army when

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Steuben joined it in February 1778. This memorandum, quoted on pages 114 to 128 of Kapp's *Life of Steuben*, is interesting. But Steuben was so prone to exaggerate his contribution to the Revolution that it must be read with a large grain of salt. Steuben wrote:

"The soldiers were scattered about in every direction. The army was looked upon as a nursery for servants, and every one deemed it his right to have a valet; several thousand soldiers were employed in this way. . . . With regard to their military discipline, I may safely say no such thing existed. In the first place there was no regular formation. A so-called regiment was formed of three platoons, another of five, eight, nine, and the Canadian regiment of twenty-one. The formation of the regiments was as varied as their mode of drill, which only consisted of the manual exercise. Each colonel had a system of his own, the one according to the English, the other according to the Prussian or French style. . . . There was another evil still more subversive of order in an army: the captains and colonels did not consider their companies and regiments as corps confided to them by the United States for the care of the men as well as the preservation of order and discipline. The greater part of the captains had no roll of their companies, and had no idea how many men they had under their orders. When I asked a colonel the strength of his regiment, the usual reply was, 'something between two and three hundred men.' The colonels, and often the captains, granted leave of absence as they thought proper, and not only that, but permissions to retire from the service. The officers were not accustomed to remain with the troops when the army was in camp; they lived in houses, often several miles distant. . . .

"The internal administration of a regiment and a company was a thing completely unknown. The quarter-master received arms, ammunition and camp equipage, for an entire brigade.

## RICHARD HENRY LEE

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The clothing and provisions were distributed in the same way by brigades. A captain who did not know the number of men in his company, could not know the number of the rations and other articles necessary for it. There were absolutely no regulations for the service of the camp and of the guards. Each colonel encamped his regiment according to his fancy. There were guards and pickets, and sometimes too many; but the officers did not know their duty, and in many instances did not understand the object of the guard." (pp. 116-119.)

### RICHARD HENRY LEE

There was gossip during the winter of 1777-78 that Richard Henry Lee was a ringleader in the supposed Cabal, and on December 18, 1777, Washington's friend Benjamin Harrison, former congressman from Virginia, wrote Robert Morris of a report circulating in Virginia that a motion had been made in Congress "to divide the command of the army and that R.H.L. was at the bottom of it." (Rosenbach, *A Catalogue of Autograph Letters and Documents relating to the Declaration of Independence*, p. 42.) Washington apparently mentioned this in a missing letter to Lund Washington, to which Lund replied:

"Mount Vernon, February 18th, 1778.

"... Colonel Mason (who I showed your letter of the 16th of January) tells me he was informed of the cabal against you, before he left Williamsburg and some had hinted to him that R. H. Lee was one suspected of having a hand in it, and as they knew the intimacy existing between them, begged that he would talk to Lee and discover whether anything of the sort was in agitation or not. He did so. Lee declares no such thing or even a hint has ever been mentioned in Congress, and that he should look upon it as one of the greatest misfortunes that



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could befall this continent, should you by any means whatever give up the command of the Army, for fully convinced he was in his own opinion no other man upon this continent was equal to the task; that he had often lamented the heavy burden you bore, and the difficulties you had to surmount more than any man ever had before." (Toner transcripts, Papers of George Washington, Vol. 730, pp. 295-98, Library of Congress.)

Despite the ring of truth in this denial, Wharton, in his *Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence* (I, 281), says that if only the code in which Richard Henry Lee and his brother Arthur carried on their correspondence could be deciphered, "much of the cloud which hangs over the congressional intrigues of that critical period would be removed." But Burnett, who finally deciphered the Lees' code, states that the Lee letters contain "no revelations upon the Conway Cabal" (Burnett, *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, III, xxxiii). In the course of a long and painstaking search, I have found no evidence whatsoever that Lee was anything but loyal to Washington.

### THE WASHINGTON-CORBIN AFFAIR

On September 17, 1757, Washington wrote Governor Dinwiddie, concerning William Peachy's letter to him about his old friend Richard Corbin. Washington quoted Peachy's letter and added:

"It is evident, from a variety of circumstances, and especially from the change in your Honor's conduct towards me, that some person, as well inclined to detract, but better skilled in the art of detraction, than the author of the above stupid scandal, has made free with my character. For I cannot suppose, that malice so absurd, so barefaced, so diametrically opposite

## EVIDENCE OF GATES' PARTICIPATION

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to truth, to common policy, and, in short, to every thing but villainy, as the above is, could impress you with so ill an opinion of my honor and honesty."

And, on September 18, he wrote Peachy himself:

"Your favor of the 22d ultimo came to hand about four days ago. In answer to that part, which relates to Colonel Corbin's gross and infamous reflections on my conduct last spring, it will be needless, I dare say, to observe further at this time, than that the liberty, which he has been pleased to allow himself in sporting with my character, is little else than a comic entertainment, discovering at one view his passionate fondness for your friend, his inviolable love of truth, his unfathomable knowledge, and the masterly strokes of his wisdom in displaying it."

Dinwiddie replied on September 24:

"Y<sup>r</sup> other Letter of the 17<sup>th</sup> I perus'd; I w<sup>d</sup> gladly hope there is no Truth in it. I never heard of it before, or did I ever believe You would have sent down any Alarms without proper Foundation; however I shall shew it to Col<sup>o</sup> Corbin when he comes to Town, but I wou'd advise You not to give Notice to every idle Story You hear for if I was to regard Reports of different kinds, I shou'd be constantly perplex'd." (Hamilton, *Letters to Washington*, II, 204.)

Dinwiddie left Virginia a few months later, and this letter from him to Washington is the last record of the Corbin affair.

### THE SUPPOSED DIRECT EVIDENCE OF GATES' PARTICIPATION

The generally accepted view that Gates was a ringleader in the alleged Cabal is based mainly on the supposed circumstantial evidence discussed in the body of this book.

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There is also, however, alleged direct evidence of Gates' participation in the Cabal, consisting of supposed statements of Daniel Morgan and John Howland. Morgan's statement is recorded in the following passage in Henry (Light Horse Harry) Lee's *Memoirs*, I, 260, first edition, 1812:

"General Morgan says, that immediately after the surrender of Burgoyne, he visited Gates on business, when he was taken aside by the general and confidentially told, that the main army was extremely dissatisfied with the conduct of the war by the commander in chief, and that several of the best officers threatened to resign unless a change took place. Morgan perfectly understood the views of Gates in this conference, although he was then a stranger to the correspondence which he had held with Conway and others, and sternly replied, 'That he had one favor to ask of him, which was, never to mention that detestable subject to him again; for under no other commander in chief than Washington would he serve.'"

Howland's statement appears in Stone's *Life and Recollections of John Howland*, 1857, pp. 91-93:

"In relation to this subject" (the Conway Cabal) "he" (Howland) "speaks as follows: . . . 'I soon discovered that Washington and his removal from office was the theme, a discovery confirmed in my mind, when Gates said to Adams, "what the devil is the matter with Ellery? I thought we could depend on him." To this, and other remarks, Adams answered only as before with a h-u-m and a scowl. Having completed my work,' " (dressing Gates' hair; Howland had been a barber) "'I returned to the shop with diminished respect for Gates, and thinking more of Washington than ever. Mr. Adams, it was then understood, was favorable to Gates's scheme, though I do not know that he was active in prosecuting it.'"

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As to the statement in Lee's *Memoirs* of what Morgan is supposed to have said, it is not clear whether Lee heard the story from Morgan himself or at second or third hand. Furthermore, it should be noted that the *Memoirs* were written during Lee's imprisonment for debt, which was in 1808-09, or thirty years after Gates' supposed conversation with Morgan took place, and that there is no indication as to how long after the event Morgan made his supposed statement.

As to Stone's statement of what Howland said, it should be noted that the alleged conversation between Gates and Samuel Adams is said to have taken place in Providence, to which Gates did not go until more than a year after the winter of 1777-78. Furthermore, even if the tale were not thus discredited, the ridiculousness of giving weight to it would be apparent when it is observed that Howland is supposed to have overheard the conversation when he was twenty-one years old; that, according to the Preface to Stone's book, first published in 1857, Howland did not begin to write down his recollections until "some years preceding his death"; and that his death did not occur until he had lived "a life of nearly five score years." So that the "recollection" of what Gates said was that of a nonagenarian and of a conversation he had overheard seventy years before!

Hughes not only gives weight to Lee's story, but refers seriously to Howland's *Recollections* as tending to support Samuel Adams' (and, by inference, Gates') complicity in the Cabal. (Hughes, *Washington*, III, 222 and 730.)

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BOARD OF WAR'S INSTRUCTIONS

THE instructions to Lafayette concerning the Canadian expedition consist of two parts; Instructions proper and Additional Instructions. The first, published in Tower's *The Marquis de La Fayette in the American Revolution*, I, 272-74, have long been in print. The Additional Instructions, published for the first time in Gottschalk's *Lafayette Joins the American Army* (1937), pp. 341-42, read as follows:

"General Washington has ordered Col. Hazen's regiment to march from its present station to Albany. This corps will therefore if possible be added to your strength. The Board, confiding in your discretion and the advantages which you will derive from the advice of all the principal officers who will accompany you on the expedition, deem it not only unnecessary but even impracticable to enter into a minute detail of the conduct proper to be observed by you in conducting it. They content themselves with suggesting that the design of this expedition may not be misunderstood, that its grand object is to destroy or possess the enemy's vessels and stores of every kind upon Lake Champlain and in the City of Montreal, and all cloathing and stores of every kind in the possession of private persons which may be necessary for the service of the States or serviceable to the enemy. The consequences which may arise from success are to be viewed in a secondary point of light and therefore the holding the country or prevailing upon the inhabitants to confederate with the States is not to be undertaken

## LAFAYETTE AND THE CANADIAN EXPEDITION

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but with the greatest prudence and with a prospect of durable success."

A copy, made by Laurens, of the instructions as a whole, including the Additional Instructions, is in the Washington Papers in the Library of Congress.

### THE CONVENTIONAL STORY OF LAFAYETTE AND THE CANADIAN EXPEDITION

After his opening statement concerning the Canadian Expedition of 1778, quoted in the headnote to Chapter VIII of the present book, Tower in his *Marquis de La Fayette in the American Revolution* proceeds as follows (I, 268-76):

"La Fayette had come to be looked upon as in some sense the representative of France in America; for his rank as major-general naturally made him the foremost of the French officers then serving in the Continental army, whose opinions were likely to be adopted by all the others, and his distinguished position at the Court of Versailles was supposed to give him an influence there which would be very potent in the event of participation by the French Government in the War of Independence. The party of the Cabal appear to have believed that if they could succeed in turning this influence into their own direction there was a chance that it would make them the leaders with whom the French Cabinet would treat in the negotiations which were expected to follow soon, and which were looked forward to with hopeful anticipation by all classes of people in the United States; and in that event Lee, Gates, and Conway would come forth as the great soldiers of the Revolution, who, by assuming the credit of having established an alliance which should assure the independence of America, might find an easy road to the accomplishment of their purposes, and

publish themselves as the saviors of the country. At all events, if they succeeded in nothing more, they were determined to alienate that influence from General Washington; and consequently their designs were aimed, for the moment, toward the Marquis de La Fayette.

"With exceeding cleverness, they hit upon a plan which would appeal more than any other to La Fayette, because it touched at once his love of France, his desire for glory in arms, and his readiness to inflict, by his own actions, an injury upon 'the hereditary enemy' of his country, whom every Frenchman feared and hated. This was an independent expedition, which he should be appointed to command, against Canada. The expedition, as we see it now, was nothing but a plot. It was not conceived with any regard to its ultimate success; and it failed because there was not a single element of success contained in it." (268-69)

"General Washington knew nothing of it until La Fayette received orders from Congress to take command; he was left intentionally in ignorance, and not only was he not consulted, but he was subjected to the mortification of seeing one of his own officers taken from him and ordered to assume an independent military command over which he, although Commander-in-Chief, should have neither supervision nor control. General Washington received at Valley Forge an official announcement of this expedition from the Board of War, and, without betraying any personal feeling at the insult thrust upon him by it, or criticising the action of Congress, he handed to the Marquis de La Fayette the commission which had been enclosed for him as an independent commander-in-chief." (269-70)

"It must be confessed, the plan was well conceived; but it was measured to a smaller man than the Marquis de La Fayette. He would not accept of General Conway as his adviser; he surrounded himself with friends of his own among the French-

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men then in the American service, and he petitioned and obtained the consent of Congress to attach to the expedition Major-General the Baron de Kalb, as a companion and adviser in whom he had confidence. Thus he defeated the plot.

"In General Gates's own house, in the presence of the conspirators who were known to be of the Cabal, La Fayette boldly proposed the health of General Washington and called upon them to drink it; which they did, reddening with shame."  
(276)

Trevelyan's account of Lafayette and the Canadian Expedition of 1778 (IV, 314-18) follows Tower rather closely, but, as will be seen from the following quotation, Trevelyan out-Towers Tower when the great moment of the health to General Washington in "General Gates's own house" arrives (pp. 316-17):

"It was a glittering web of romance and glory; and yet there was a seamy side to the tapestry. Lafayette shrank from the thought of entering upon a career of ambition as the rival, and the possible supplanter, of his patron and benefactor. He announced his intention of declining the appointment; but Washington urged, and at last positively insisted, that he should at once close with the offer. The Marquis accordingly set out for York, where he was received with open arms. Gates entertained him at a banquet which appeared almost sinfully profuse and luxurious to a guest who had come direct from the famine at Valley Forge. Wine and words flowed copiously; and the expected conqueror of Canada was congratulated and belauded by eloquent civilians of twice his years, and by generals who could harangue much better than they fought. The young nobleman confined his own remarks to practical business. He firmly, but quietly, let it be known that he should exercise his functions in strict subordination to General Washington, and that no consideration would induce him to accept Conway as



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his second in command. When the time for departure approached he rose to his feet, reminded the company that the most important of all the toasts had been omitted in the generous excitement of the hour, and gave the health of the Commander-in-Chief. A dead silence fell upon the audience. Glasses were raised to the lips, and set down untasted, while 'with the politest of bows, and a scarcely perceptible shrug of the shoulders, the new Commander of the Northern Army left the room, and mounted his horse to start for his headquarters at Albany.' <sup>1</sup>

"The conspirators,—unlike Cassius and Casca in the Second Act of Shakespeare's tragedy,—had knocked at the wrong door in their search for an accomplice. Lafayette made it very clear to them that he had no intention of playing Marcus Brutus to Washington's Julius Caesar. Their designs had been penetrated; their secret machinations had been dragged into the daylight; and America learned, for the first time, how near she had come to exchanging the disinterested services of George Washington, and Robert Morris, for the egotism and impotence of Horatio Gates, and Benjamin Rush. The Republic, (as every man of sense now recognised with something of a shudder,) had been threatened by a calamity more serious than the loss of half a score of pitched battles. Conway's Cabal became a by-word in all the States, and Conway himself soon disappeared from American history."

### THE MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF WAR AND OF CONGRESS IN ATTENDANCE WHEN THE CANADIAN EXPEDITION WAS APPROVED

The members of the Board with whom Lafayette conferred on January 31, 1778, about the details of the Canadian expedition were Gates and Peters, members of the new Board, and Francis Lightfoot Lee of Virginia, and Duer,

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<sup>1</sup> "Ninth chapter of Fiske's *History*."

## THE MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

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holdovers from the old (Report of Board of War, January 31, 1778, Papers of the Continental Congress, 147, Vol. 1, p. 469, Library of Congress). There is no record of the earlier meeting at which the expedition was approved, but, except that Mifflin may have been present at it, the members then present were presumably the same as those present at the later meeting.<sup>2</sup>

Although not damned as a member of the Cabal by historians, Duer and Peters did not escape the suspicions of Washington's witch-hunting officers. In writing Laurens on January 28, 1778, Lafayette placed Duer on a par with Conway in the following sweeping denunciation:

"When I was waiting this your letter and this of M. duer fell into my hands, and I see with the greatest concern that the two greatest ennemys and most insolent calumniators of my friend are directed to follow me, connway as second commandant, and duir as volunteer. the first you know my way of thinking for—the second has the reputation in the country to be a tory, and you'l know by several instances that he is a rascal . . . Connway is so much despised by every honest frenchman that no body will serve under him—and those who do not know him yet, will be lighted on his conduct as well as I have been myself." (*South Carolina*, VII, 182.)

And he took another fling at Duer in a letter of February 9, 1778, to Washington (*Memoirs*, I, 153).

I have found no basis whatsoever for Lafayette's suspicion that Duer was an enemy or calumniator of Washing-

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<sup>2</sup>Pickering did not arrive at York from headquarters until February 4, 1778 (Pickering's *Timothy Pickering*, I, 203), and Joseph Trumbull died at his home in Connecticut on July 23, 1778, without ever having assumed office. Mifflin, though not at the meeting on January 31, had been in York and may have attended the earlier meeting at which the Canadian expedition was approved.

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ton, and the following letter of September 16, 1780, from John Jay to Robert Morris shows that Lafayette's accusation of rascality was not universally accepted:

"I am glad you told me what had become of Duer. He is an honest man and I esteem him, the more perhaps as the older I grow, the more Reason I have to think them scarce. I have never known him to do a mean thing or say a false one." (Henkels, *Catalogue*, No. 1183, p. 83.)

As to Peters the fact that he was under suspicion appears from two letters from him to Robert Morris, the well-known member of Congress from Pennsylvania. On January 21, 1778, he wrote Morris:

"It is a Custom among some of the Gentlemen there" (Valley Forge) "as I am told but I know not with what Truth, to make free with Persons in the Civil Departments and I am informed I am made of Consequence enough not to escape my share of Slander. This I did not know until the Day before yesterday when I was drawn into an unprovoked Dispute with Col. Morgan of Virginia which proceeding to the last Extremity convinced me that the Col. has little understanding and notwithstanding his Character as a Soldier by no means satisfied me of the Soundness of *his Spirit*. He told me I was spoken of at Camp as concerned in a Party against General Washington, and misconceiving some thing I said or designedly mistaking it, offered to turn out as Champion for the General's Character. . . . If any such Charge exists it is the most villianous of all Falsehoods." (Burnett, III, 45-46, footnote 6.)

And on February 3, 1778, he added:

"I am glad I made the Mistake as to your going to Camp, because it afforded me an Opportunity of telling you the Story which interested your Friendship, to set the affair in its true

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Light. I am much obliged to you for the kind Part you took in the Matter. I suppose that if Misrepresentations were so great—the Progress of the Story to Manheim they must be multiplied in a quadruplicate Rate before its Arrival at Camp. I have wrote to Tilghman & should be glad if you have occasion to write to my Friend there you will mention your Sence of it. For my part I wish myself anywhere but in this disagreeable Scene. If the Jealousies which seem to exist & in which God knows I have no Hand, continue to rage much longer, I don't see how any Man of Feeling or Sentiment can continue in a public Department where every measure is looked upon with a jaundiced Eye & of course all Mistakes magnified into Sins political or moral. Unless great Alterations take Place the first & most capital of which is the Restoration of personal Harmony, I don't expect much from an arrangement of this Department in which I confess, leaving myself out of the Question, I promised great Advantage to the Cause. . . . When I am in a better Humour I shall write you a more chearful Letter, but you have drawn this upon you by flattering me so much as to take me into your Friendship." (Henkels, *Catalogue* No. 1183, pp. 95-96.)

Considering that Peters was a conservative, the son of a well-to-do Pennsylvania lawyer and a fellow churchman of Washington, he might be expected to be particularly attracted to Washington,<sup>8</sup> and I have found no evidence to contradict Peters' emphatic assertion that he was not "concerned in a party against General Washington."

There is no record of what members were actually present in Congress on January 22 and 23, 1778, when the Canadian expedition was set on foot. But Burnett's *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, III, li-lxii, has a record of the period that the various congressmen were in

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<sup>8</sup> Washington, when President, appointed Peters judge of the United States District Court for the District of Pennsylvania, where he had a distinguished career, particularly in the field of admiralty law.

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attendance upon Congress during 1778, and from this it appears that the following were in York on the days mentioned above.

|                            |                             |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Eliphalet Dyer—Connecticut | Cornelius Harnett—North     |
| Edward Langworthy—         | Carolina                    |
| Georgia                    | John Penn—North Carolina    |
| Joseph Wood—Georgia        | William Clingan—Pennsyl-    |
| James Forbes—Maryland      | vania                       |
| John Henry, Jr.—Maryland   | Daniel Roberdeau—Pennsyl-   |
| Elbridge Gerry—Massachu-   | vania                       |
| setts                      | James Smith—Pennsylvania    |
| James Lovell—Massachusetts | Jonathan Bayard Smith—      |
| George Frost—New Hamp-     | Pennsylvania                |
| shire                      | William Ellery—Rhode Island |
| Abraham Clark—New Jersey   | Henry Laurens (President)—  |
| John Witherspoon—New       | South Carolina              |
| Jersey                     | John Harvie—Virginia        |
| William Duer—New York      | Francis Lightfoot Lee—      |
| Gouverneur Morris—New      | Virginia                    |
| York                       |                             |

Among the members then on hand, none except Lovell and Clark appears even to have criticized Washington, much less sought to oust him from the chief command.

### POSSIBLE REASONS FOR LAFAYETTE'S RIGHT-ABOUT CONCERNING CONWAY

It is, of course, impossible to know with certainty what caused Lafayette's change from friendship to suspicion and hostility toward Conway. Possibly Lafayette had more justification than now appears, but jealousy—fear that Conway was changing from a satellite into a rival—seems to have been the primary factor. There is an inkling of this in a

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letter from Lafayette to Henry Laurens, president of Congress, in reply to the following letter of December 6, 1777, from Laurens:

"General Conway has devoted much of his time in York to our Marine Committee by planning & recommending in particular explanations, a Scheme which is very inviting & which, when we are able, will undoubtedly be carried into execution." (Laurens Letter Book, No. 10, 1776-78; South Carolina Historical Society Library.)

Apparently apprehensive that Congress was considering Conway as leader of the Scheme—an attack on the British possessions in the East Indies—Lafayette replied on December 14:

"that project wants a man at the head of it who by his weight in france could undertake things which would loose a gentleman less firm in that country by his connexions and all our others french prejugas—influence about court is not only necessary he must have some fortune to risk expensive enterprizes—these considerations engaged me to believe that I could be of some use to america if in the same time that I am fighting here, I would induce the french ministry in supporting enterprizes which schall certainly finish by a war between france and england—I have therefore the pleasure to inform you that by Mr de valfort I wrote a long letter to the count de maurepas, whom I desire to consider himself and propose to the King in my name <sup>4</sup> the following project . . . to be explained in very long

<sup>4</sup>Lafayette occasionally garnished his letters to Laurens and others in America with intimations of his influential position at the French Court. The fact was that he had not even had enough influence at Court to have himself retained on the active list in the army (see Gottschalk's *Lafayette Comes to America*, 53-54), and therefore presumably had not ventured to ask Maurepas to propose any project "to the King in my name." The letter to Maurepas (dated October 24, 1777), to which Lafayette apparently refers, is published in Stevens' *Facsimiles*, VIII, No. 756. It contains no reference to the King.

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terms what I'll do at our first interview." (*South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, VII, 60-61.)

On January 5, 1778, Lafayette reported a rumor to Washington that Conway had asked Congress to appoint him "Ambassador to France or as commander in chief in Georgia" (Sparks Papers, Harvard College Library), either of which posts, but especially the former, Lafayette himself would presumably have liked to receive. Finally, on January 20, 1778, hearing that Conway was to be placed in command of an expedition to Canada, Lafayette wrote Washington:

"this same man" (Major Mullens) "thinks that there are some projects to send Connway to Canada—They will laugh in france when they'll hear that he is choosen upon such a Commission out of the same army where I am, principally as he is an irish man, and when the project should be to show to the french of that country a man of theyr nation who by his rank in france could inspire them with some confidence but I mention that only as a remark, for I do not encertain any idea of leaving your army nor my virginian division, but i would not loose a moment to advise you of that journey." (Sparks Papers, Harvard College Library.)

The following facts should also be considered in appraising the weight to be given statements made by Lafayette at this time concerning Conway or anyone else deemed hostile to Washington. As shown in Gottschalk's *Lafayette Comes to America*, Lafayette's position in France had been that of a rich, ambitious, young man from the country, who, though married to a member of an important and powerful family, cut anything but a distinguished figure at

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the French Court. Eager for glory, and finding his career in the French army blocked by being retired from active service, he made a contract with Deane, American Commissioner in Paris, assuring him the rank of major-general in the American army. But when he arrived in the United States, Congress, exasperated by Deane's ill-advised contracts, gave him a commission, as stipulated in the agreement, but no command. His situation was therefore as inglorious in America as at home. But he prudently kept in touch with Gates,<sup>5</sup> Laurens, and Washington, and in the end got what he wanted. On November 26, 1777, Washington wrote Congress suggesting that Lafayette be given a command; on December 1, Congress voted its approval; and three days later Washington appointed Lafayette to the command of the division of General Adam Stephen of Virginia, recently dismissed from the service.

Is it not likely, under these circumstances, that Lafayette, grateful and devoted to Washington for his helpfulness,<sup>6</sup> would be biased against anyone who was regarded by Washington as an enemy?

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<sup>5</sup> On October 14, 1777, Lafayette got in touch with Gates by writing him a letter of congratulation on his first victory over Burgoyne. (Gates Papers, The New York Historical Society.) On December 1, he sent him "a thousand tender compliments" by a French officer (Lafayette to du Fouchet, Van Wickle Library, Lafayette College), and on December 14, 1777, he wrote, "You can depend upon my attachment forever." (Gates Papers, The New York Historical Society.)

<sup>6</sup> For example, in the following letter to his father-in-law, the Duc D'Ayen, written on December 16, 1777, a few days after Washington had appointed him to Stephen's old command, Lafayette said of Washington: "I admire each day more fully the excellence of his character, and the kindness of his heart." (*Memoirs, Correspondence and Manuscripts of General Lafayette*, I, 131.)



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### CONGRESS' FAILURE TO CONSULT WASHINGTON ABOUT LAFAYETTE'S APPOINTMENT TO THE CANADIAN COMMAND

On February 3, 1778, Henry Laurens wrote John Rutledge, of South Carolina:

"Congress have projected an Irruption into Canada, and have appointed Marquis delafayette 1st, Major Gen Conway 2d, and Brigadier Genl. Stark 3d in Command. the Marquis came from Camp to York, discovered a noble resentment for the affront offered to his Commander Genl. Washington, to whom his appointment had not been intimated by Congress, said he would not go without a General Officer of the Rank of 'Major General' in whom he could put confidence, and therefore demanded Genl. McDougal or Baron Kalb and that their appointment Should be through his General.

"Congress and the Board of War hesitated. the Marquis said if he was disappointed he must immediately go to France to account for his conduct, and that every foreign Officer could accompany him. had an Irruption of this nature taken place, the World at large must have been informed of the unmeritted insult offered the General and Commander in Chief, and Censure must have followed both on Congress and the Board of War. Ignorance perhaps might have accounted for the conduct of the former, although they were warned against the unjustifiable step. a good deal of struggle was made to elude the Marquis's demands. he was firm and succeeded, and this morning he took leave of me and proceeded to the Camp in order as he says, to receive the Commands of his General, to take either Genl. McDougal or Genl. Kalb with him and go rapidly forward to Albany. he speaks of G C in the most unfavorable terms, who will be much mortified by this new arrangement.

"I count it a misfortune that I do not approve of this Canada expedition because I am almost Single in opinion. however there

## CONGRESS' FAILURE TO CONSULT WASHINGTON

is no Man in our Army So likely to succeed in it as this Young Noble Man. he is skilful in the Art of War, is sensible and brave and will have great Influence in Canada with the Noblesse, the Church and the Commonalty. he takes in his suite some eight or ten french Officers in order to raise Companies in that Country." (Burnett, *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, III, 64-65.)

If Laurens thought that Washington might be affronted, because of Congress' failure to give Washington advance notice of the proposed expedition and of Lafayette's appointment to command it, why did he not himself write a personal letter about the matter to Washington as he did to Lafayette? Two possible explanations suggest themselves. The first is that Laurens did not know that the Board's letter of notification to Lafayette had been sent to Washington—not directly to Lafayette—and had been accompanied by a courteous letter to Washington about the projected expedition. The second is that, having disapproved of the expedition from the first, he viewed with jaundiced eye the actions of Congress and the Board of War pertaining to it.

But whatever the correct explanation of Laurens' remarks may be, his criticism of the Board and Congress was apparently not justified.

## CHAPTER XI

### FLOGGING IN THE AMERICAN ARMY

FLOGGING was authorized in the regulations drawn up for the government of the proposed Massachusetts army just prior to the day of Lexington and Concord. But the number of lashes was restricted to a maximum of thirty-nine.<sup>1</sup> (Article 50 of the Rules and Regulations for the Massachusetts Army, adopted April 5, 1775; *Journals of the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, p. 128.) The Continental Congress embodied a similar restriction in paragraph 51 of its Articles of War, adopted June 30, 1775.

Washington, who, as colonel and commander-in-chief of the regiment of Virginia volunteers in the 1755-56 campaign of the French and Indian War, prescribed penalties of "five hundred Lashes" for plundering or quarreling down to "one hundred lashes" for "Any Soldier found Drunk" (Orders of October 23, 1755, and May 1, 1756), must have chafed at this restriction. In June 1776, the Judge-Advocate-General recommended to Congress that the maximum number of lashes be increased to one hundred, and this recommendation was embodied in Section 18, Article 3, of the revised Articles of War which Con-

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<sup>1</sup> The Mosaic Law sanctioned up to *forty stripes* (Deuteronomy, Chapter 25, Verse 3). But by New Testament days the regulation number appears to have been reduced to thirty-nine. St. Paul reported in Second Corinthians, Chapter 11, Verse 24, "five times received I forty stripes save one."

## FLOGGING IN THE AMERICAN ARMY

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gress adopted on September 20, 1776. This recommendation presumably had Washington's approval, since he himself wrote Congress on September 24, 1776, that a maximum of thirty-nine lashes was "inadequate."

The Journal, supposedly kept during the war and later rewritten by James Thacher, a surgeon in the American army, indicates that the severe punishment thus authorized by Congress did not satisfy the officers in command. They resorted to "spacing" the authorized number of lashes, by first beating the soldier's back to an exquisite tenderness with, say, fifty stripes and then later administering the balance of the authorized number of lashes to his lacerated and inflamed skin. Sometimes the poor devil was punished by the unauthorized penalty of forcing him to run the gauntlet, long a favorite sport of the Indians in connection with the torture of their captives. Thacher records as of January 1780:

"The culprit being securely tied to a tree, or post, receives on his naked back the number of lashes assigned him, by a whip formed of several small knotted cords, which sometimes cut through the skin at every stroke. However strange it may appear, a soldier will often receive the severest stripes without uttering a groan, or once shrinking from the lash, even while the blood flows freely from his lacerated wounds. This must be ascribed to stubbornness or pride. They have however, adopted a method which they say mitigates the anguish in some measure, it is by putting between the teeth a leaden bullet, on which they chew while under the lash, till it is made quite flat and jagged. In some instances of incorrigible villains, it is adjudged by the court that the culprit receive his punishment at several different times, a certain number of stripes repeated at intervals of two or three days, in which case the wounds are

## CHAPTER XI—APPENDIX

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in a state of inflammation, and the skin rendered more sensibly tender; and the terror of the punishment is greatly aggravated. Another mode of punishment is that of running the *gantlet*, this is done by a company of soldiers standing in two lines, each one furnished with a switch, and the criminal is made to run between them and receive the scourge from their hands on his naked back." (Thacher, *Military Journal*, First Ed., pp. 222-23.)

The major details of Thacher's statements are corroborated by a General Order of Washington, signed and issued at Morristown, New Jersey, January 3, 1780, reading in part as follows:

"At a Division Court Martial held in camp, Morristown, by order of Brigadier General Stark Commandant, December 28th. 1779, Lieutenant Colonel Huntington Presidt. . . .

"John McLean and William Harper, soldiers in the 4th. New York regiment, were tried for, 'Desertion and being absent above twelve months,' and found guilty of a breach of the 1st. article of the 6th. section of the articles of War and sentenced, that McLean receive one hundred lashes on his naked back to be inflicted at four several times and that Harper run the Gauntlope thro' the brigade to which he belongs. . . .

"The Commander in Chief approves each and every of the foregoing sentences." (*Writings of Washington*, XVII, 344-347.)<sup>2</sup>

On February 3, 1781, Washington wrote a long letter to Congress, recommending that it make a change in the rules for punishments in the army, including the grant to courts-martial of power to increase the number of lashes to a maxi-

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<sup>2</sup> Desertion to the enemy or in battle was of course punishable and frequently punished by the death sentence. The "desertion" for which many of the floggings were meted out was apparently absent without leave, a common misdemeanor in every army.

## FLOGGING IN THE AMERICAN ARMY

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mum of five hundred. If the brutal punishment of flogging was an essential army measure, the reasons advanced by Washington in support of his recommendation for an increase in the number of lashes allowed had much force. Congress, by a close vote, rejected this recommendation, so strikingly at variance with the humanitarian ideals of some of the leaders of the Revolution. (*Journals of the Continental Congress*, XX, 658.)

## CHAPTER XIII

### WAS CONGRESS "COWARDLY" IN LEAVING PHILADELPHIA?

STEPHENSON and Dunn's statement, charging Congress with cowardice, quoted in footnote 1 of Chapter XIII, is presumably based on two letters written by members of the Continental Congress. In the first, dated December 24, 1776, relating to the removal of Congress from Philadelphia to Baltimore in December, 1776, William Whipple wrote John Langdon:

"The near approach of the enemy to that city" (Philadelphia) "struck such a panick in all orders of people there, except Tories, (of which you know there are not a small number,) that the contagion seized the nerves of some members of C—, which caused a removal to this place, which I assure you was much against my inclination."

In the second, dated September 18, 1777, relating to Congress' flight from Philadelphia to Lancaster on that very day, Henry Laurens wrote John L. Gervais:

"All our affairs are undoubtedly in a better appearance than they were three days ago, but fright has driven some great Men to do precipitantly what I strongly urged as necessary to do coolly and deliberately as soon as we learned of Mr. Howe's landing at Elk."

At first thought, these letters might be regarded as establishing the truth of Stephenson and Dunn's charge. But it

is common knowledge that a person is apt to speak well of his own coolness in contrast to the lack of it among his fellows, and the statements quoted above must therefore be taken with a grain of salt.

Some of the members of Congress who fled from Philadelphia may have been unduly alarmed at the prospect of being captured and hung for treason. But there is no evidence that, as a body, the members of Congress behaved in a cowardly manner in leaving when they did. The pertinent facts in the matter are these.

As soon as Howe captured the garrison at Fort Washington, he sent Cornwallis to New Jersey to attack Washington's depleted and demoralized forces. Cornwallis pursued them across the state of New Jersey. On December 8, 1776, they crossed the Delaware River into Pennsylvania; stripping the New Jersey bank of the river of all boats as they went.<sup>1</sup> The army and Philadelphia were thus made safe temporarily, but they would remain so only until Howe could bring forward boats or pontoons or until the river should freeze sufficiently to hold his men and artillery. On December 10, Washington wrote to Lund Washington: "I tremble for Philadelphia. Nothing, in my opinion, but Gen. Lee's speedy arrival . . . can save it." On the same day he sent General Putnam, his senior officer present, and General Mifflin, to Philadelphia to supervise the defense of the city.

On December 12, Congress resolved to move from Philadelphia to Baltimore. The next day Congressman Oliver Wolcott of Connecticut wrote to his wife:

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<sup>1</sup> There were no bridges across the Delaware, this far down the river, at that time.



## CHAPTER XIII—APPENDIX

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"the Congress upon the advice of Genl. Putnam and Mifflin who are now here to provide for the Protection of the Places as well as from the Resultt of their own opinion have adjourned themselves, to Baltimore in Maryland, a Place about 110 miles from this City . . . so that I am this Moment going forward for that Place."

The fact that this retirement was made after deliberation and on the advice of Washington's officers is confirmed by the minutes of Congress of December 12, which record:

"General Putnam and Brigadier General Mifflin being called to a conference, and having, by strong arguments, urged the necessity of the Congress retiring, it was, therefore, . . . Resolved, That this Congress be, for the present, adjourned to the town of Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, to meet on the 20th instant."

Howe's drive against Philadelphia was postponed for many months so that the move to Baltimore at this time proved to be unnecessary; but that was a piece of good fortune which could not be foreseen.

The second removal, unlike the first, was precipitate. But, under the circumstances about to be described, there is no justification for the disparaging view that it was "cowardly." After Washington's defeat at the Brandywine, the British arrived in force on the west bank of the Schuylkill River, not far above Philadelphia which lies on its east bank. Faced with the fact that Washington might be again defeated and the city fall any day, Congress resolved on September 14, 1777, that if it was "obliged to remove from Philadelphia, Lancaster shall be the place at which they shall meet." On September 18, Congress received a letter from Washington, written the day before, containing the cryptic statement:

"The Enemy seem now to be straining every nerve to accomplish their purpose;" (the capture of Philadelphia) "but I trust, whatever present success they may have, they will ere long experience a reverse of fortune."

And on the night of the 18th Washington's aide-de-camp, Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Hamilton, sent John Hancock, president of Congress, the following message:

"Sir:

If Congress have not left Philadelphia they ought to do it immediately without fail; for the enemy have the means of throwing a party this night into the city. I just now passed the Valley Forge—in doing which a party of the enemy came down and fired upon us in the boat, by which means I lost my horse—one man was killed, and another wounded. The boats were abandoned, and will fall into their hands. I did all I could to prevent this, but to no purpose." (Lodge, *Works of Hamilton*, VII, 520.)

On receipt of this message, Hancock, of course, got the members of Congress out of the city as quickly as possible, for the capture of the heads of the rebel government would have been a triumph of the first water for the victorious Howe. The following entry of September 19, 1777, in John Adams' diary tells the story:

"19. Friday. At three, this morning, was waked by Mr. Lovel, and told that the members of Congress were gone, some of them, a little after midnight; that there was a letter from Mr. Hamilton, aid-de-camp to the General, informing that the enemy were in possession of the ford and the boats, and had it in their power to be in Philadelphia before morning, and that, if Congress was not removed, they had not a moment to lose. Mr. Marchant and myself arose, sent for our horses, and, after

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collecting our things, rode off after the others.” (Burnett, *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, II, 498.)

Hamilton was prematurely alarmed; the British did not enter Philadelphia until September 26, 1777. But surely no one can justly accuse John Adams and his colleagues of cowardice for having acted on so urgent a message from one of Washington’s aides.

## CHAPTER XV

### WASHINGTON'S LETTERS ABOUT THE FRENCH COMMANDERS

THE letters to Jones, Fitzhugh, and Armstrong, referred to in the body of the chapter, were as follows:

*Washington to Jones, March 24, 1781:*

“Private.

It is a misfortune which seems to attend all our measures to do things unseasonably—or rather to neglect the critical moment to do them. Had the French Commanders at Rhode Island complied (in the first instance) with my request to send the whole Fleet, and a detachment from their Land force to Virginia, the destruction of Arnold's Corps must inevitably have been compleated during the debilitated State of the British Fleet. The enterprize now is bold, and precarious—rendered more so by an unfortunate, and to me unaccountable delay of twenty four hours in their quitting Newport after it was said they were ready to Sail. The Wind & Weather being as favourable to them, and as adverse to the Enemy in Gardners bay, as the powers of the Air could devise. but it ought to be our policy to make the most of their assistance without disgusting them by by our censures, or reminding them of their mistakes. for this reason it is I inform you, in confidence that upon the first certain advice of the injury sustained by the British fleet I proposed the Expedition to Portsmouth, to consist of the whole fleet and a detachment of Land forces from both Armies; assuring them that nothing could be done to effect without a

## CHAPTER XV—APPENDICES

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co-operation by Land & Water—accordingly, that no time might be lost in waiting their Answer I set about the formation of my own detachment, & had marched it off before I knew that a ship & two frigates *only* without Land Troops had left Rhode Island; & which had it not been for the accidental meeting of the Romulus & the Vessels under its Convoy, w<sup>d</sup> have returned as they went.” (HM 5260, Washington file, Huntington Library.)

*Washington to Fitzhugh, March 25, 1781:*

“Private.

It is to be lamented, greatly lamented, that the French commanders at Newport did not adopt the measure of sending the Fleet and a detachm<sup>t</sup> of their land force to Chesapeake bay when I first proposed it to them (in the moment I received the first cert’n information of the damage done to the British at Gardiner’s bay). Had the expedition been undertaken at that time, nothing could have saved Arnold’s corps (during the weakened state of the British ships) from destruction. Instead of this, a small detachment only was sent from the fleet, which, as I foretold, would have returned as they went, had it not been for the accidental meeting of the Romulus, and the vessels under her convoy. But as there is no rectifying past errors—and as it is our true policy to stand well with friends on whom we so much depend, I relate this in confidence.” (Ford, *Writings of Washington*, IX, 190-91.)

*Washington to Armstrong, March 26, 1781:*

“Private.

It is to be lamented, greatly lamented, that the French Commander, at Newport did not adopt the measure of sending the Fleet & a detachm<sup>t</sup> of their land force to Chesapeake bay when I first proposed it to them (in the moment I received the first certain information of the damage done to the British fleet at

## ROCHAMBEAU'S LETTER TO WASHINGTON

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Gardners bay) Had the Expedition been undertaken at that time, nothing could have saved Arnolds Corps (during the weakened State of the B Ships) from destruct<sup>n</sup>—instead of this, a small detachm<sup>t</sup> only was sent from the fleet; which, as I for-told, would have returned as they went, had it not been for the accidental Meeting of the Romulus, & the Vessels under her Convoy—but as (I have observed before) there is no rectifying past errors—and as it is our true policy to stand well with friends, on whom we so much depend, I relate this in confidence.” (Papers of George Washington, Vol. 169, Library of Congress.)

### ROCHAMBEAU'S LETTER TO WASHINGTON OF APRIL 26, 1781

On April 26, 1781, General Rochambeau wrote Washington the following letter published in Doniol, V, 452-453:

“De Newport, le 26 avril 1781

“Monsieur,

“La *Gazette de New-York* a publié une prétendue lettre interceptée de Votre Excellence à M. Laud Washington, dans laquelle se trouve un paragraphe: ‘Il est mal-heureux, je vous ‘dis ceci en confidence, que la flotte et le détachement français ‘n’aient pas entrepris l’expédition actuelle dans le temps où je le ‘leur avais proposé. La destruction du corps d’Arnold aurait ‘été inévitable avant que la flotte anglaise eût pu mettre à la ‘mer; au lieu de cela, on a convoyé la petite escadre qui a pris ‘le *Romulus* et d’autres bâtiments, mais qui ne pouvait, comme ‘je l’avais prédit, rien faire sans l’assistance de quelques troupes ‘de terre à Portsmouth.’

“Si cette lettre est véritablement de Votre Excellence, il paraîtrait résulter de cette réflexion que le chevalier Destouches ayant eu le choix de deux expéditions proposées, on a pré-

fééré de s'attacher à la plus petite de préférence à une plus grande que Votre Excellence désirait; mais je la supplierais, dans ce cas, de se rappeler que la sortie du vaisseau et des deux frégates de Newport est du 9 février, sur la réquisition faite au chevalier Destouches par le Congrès et l'État de Virginie; que la lettre de Votre Excellence portant le plan de faire sortir l'escadre entière avec un détachement de 1,000 Français qui devait agir concurremment avec celui de M. de la Fayette, est datée du 15 février; que je ne l'ai reçue que le 19; que, l'ayant communiquée tout de suite au chevalier Destouches, j'eus l'honneur de vous envoyer le 20 sa réponse; que notre escadre est sortie le 8 mars; que, dès le lendemain du coup de vent qui a affaibli les Anglais à la fin de janvier, je n'ai cessé d'offrir de l'armée de terre tout ce qu'il serait possible à la marine de transporter. Je n'entre dans aucun des détails qui ont pu employer quinze jours jusqu'au départ de l'escadre de M. Destouches, parce que les raisons qu'il en a données à Votre Excellence ne sont pas de mon ressort; mais je ne lui soumetts cette explication que pour lui rappeler ces époques qu'elle voudra bien constater dans sa correspondance, pour qu'elle soit bien persuadée qu'en tout ce qui regarde la terre et le petit corps français que je commande, il n'y aura jamais aucun retard dans toute exécution possible de ses ordres, dès qu'ils me seront parvenus. Je supplie Votre Excellence, à cette occasion, de considérer que, comme je n'ai rien à commander à la marine, je crois qu'il conviendrait qu'elle voulût bien écrire directement au chevalier Destouches dès qu'il est question d'une opération de son escadre, sauf à me l'adresser à cachet volant, si elle désire que j'en sois le solliciteur. J'ai cru remarquer qu'il était sensible à ce que les plans qui le concernaient ne lui fussent pas directement adressés, et Votre Excellence n'ignore pas que chacun est jaloux de son commandement. . . .

“Je supplie Votre Excellence de me répondre sur tous ces points avec toute la candeur qui est dans son caractère, pour

## WASHINGTON'S LETTERS TO ROCHAMBEAU

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que je puisse préparer tout à l'avance à la plus prompte exécution de tout ce qu'elle m'ordonnera."

THE ALLUSION TO AN EARLIER INFORMAL PROPOSAL IN WASHINGTON'S LETTER TO ROCHAMBEAU OF APRIL 30, 1781

In his letter to Rochambeau of April 30, 1781, Washington said:

"As to the apparent insinuation that the first expedition had been preferred to the one proposed by me . . . I could not but have recollected that my *formal* proposal did not reach you till after the departure of the first Squadron."

The *informal* proposal thus alluded to is presumably the following statement in a letter from Washington to Rochambeau, dated February 7, 1781:

"I am much obliged to your Excellency for the agreeable intelligence contained in your letter of the 29th. of January. I hope the confirmation will have enabled Mr. Destouches to take advantage of the event, in a manner as advancive of his own glory as of the good of the service. I impatiently wait further advices.

"By the last accounts from Virginia which came down to the 20th. Arnold had reimbarked from West-Over, the place mentioned in my former letter had descended as far as Smithfield relanded there and marched to Portsmouth. Here it was expected he would fortify. There have been some skirmishes but to little effect on either side. The enemy on their march showed their usual avidity for plunder. If Mr Des touches should have acquired a superiority, which would make it prudent to act, Yr. Excellency may think this detachment an object."



The enterprise to which Washington refers was mentioned in Rochambeau's letter of January 29, 1781, as follows:

"The Chevalier Destouches is waiting for more exact intelligence" (of the storm damage to the British fleet) "to go out with his whole fleet. I hope, at least, that it will enable him to send one man of war with two frigates to cruise before Chesapeake bay to break the communication from Newyork to the South." (Papers of George Washington, Vol. 164, Library of Congress)

Washington must have known, had he given the matter thought, that his letter of February 7 could not possibly have reached Rochambeau and Destouches before the detachment to Virginia had been sent. Furthermore, this letter cannot be fairly described as a proposal that the whole fleet, rather than only a detachment of it, be sent, much less that a French land force should accompany the fleet to Virginia.

### WASHINGTON'S LETTER TO LAFAYETTE

On April 15, 1781, Lafayette wrote Washington:

"a letter from you Relating to the delays of the french makes a Great Noise at Philadelphia. Indeed it gives me pain on Many political Accounts." (*Writings of Washington*, XXI, 491n.)

Washington replied on the 22nd:

"I am very sorry that any letter of mine should be the subject of public discussion, or give the smallest uneasiness to any person living. The letter, to which I presume you allude, was a confidential one from me to Mr. Lund Washington (with whom I have lived in perfect intimacy for near 20 Years). I

can neither avow the letter as it is published by Mr. Rivington, nor declare that it is spurious, because my letter to this Gentl. was wrote in great haste, and no copy of it was taken; all I remember of the matter is, that at the time of writing it, I was a good deal chagreened to find by your letter of the 15th. of March (from York Town in Virginia) that the French fleet had not, at that time, appeared within the Capes of Chesapeak; and meant (in strict confidence) to express my apprehensions and concern for the delay; but as we know that the alteration of a single word does, oftentimes, pervert the Sense, or give force to expression unintended by the letter writer, I should not be surprized at Mr. Rivington's or the Inspector of his Gazette having taken this liberty with the letter in question . . ."

HUGHES' *GEORGE WASHINGTON*

Among American historians and biographers who have written on the period of the Revolution, Rupert Hughes occupies a unique position. No one else has brought together so large a mass of significant and interesting material bearing on Washington's part in the war. My own debt to Hughes is great; many of the chapters in this book were suggested by facts brought out in his volumes. But Hughes is dangerously unreliable. He tends to give as much weight to hearsay repeated years after the event by an embittered partisan as to contemporary first-hand observations recorded before the event dealt with became controversial. Paragraph upon paragraph of relatively unimportant statement will be meticulously documented, only to be followed by a sweeping and, if true, highly important statement, without the citation of any supporting evidence whatsoever. Serious students of the Revolution must read Hughes—but with caution.

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